



September 2008

# *Mining History News*

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mining History Association

## **Abandoned Mines: Balancing Risks and Rewards**

Abandoned mines have always been dangerous places, particularly for the novice. This spring three young California entrepreneurs sadly discovered how dangerous. Hoping to reopen a Mother Lode gold mine, they climbed down a 20-foot shaft and started a gas-powered pump to drain it. Searchers later found all three sprawled on the shaft floor, dead of carbon monoxide poisoning.<sup>1</sup>

I was lucky as a kid, surviving an exploring trip into an old horizontal adit in Idaho. Not far from the entrance a box filled with the gelatinized remains of a dozen sticks of dynamite attracted my attention. Somehow I overcame the impulse to explore further. Perhaps it was the memory of my eyebrows suddenly disappearing after I had set a match to a couple ounces of black powder I had discovered earlier that made me cautious.

Old mines still attract adventurers and treasure hunters around the world, whether individual or corporate, lawful or illegal. They also can become deadly traps for the innocent or uninformed. Just scanning recent global headlines is a sobering reminder that the rewards of a close encounter with an abandoned mine may not match the risks. In South Africa, sulphic acid and heavy metals leaking into a reservoir from 18 old mines are killing crocodiles and thousands of fish. In southern England, horses are endangered by subsidence from long-abandoned underground workings. In Western Australia, a Korean man drowned in a popular local swimming hole formed in the pit of an old coal mine.<sup>2</sup>

The American West is littered with abandoned mine sites, and many are still dangerous despite the \$2.6

billion spent on reclamation projects since 1998 by the Environmental Protection Agency, the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service and the Office of Surface Mining. Each year watery pits, crumbling portals or open shafts concealed in brush claim a number of victims, both human and animal. In the last four years up to 2008, 124 people died at inactive or abandoned mine property, most of them young men in swimming or off-road vehicle accidents. Recently, the General Accounting Office estimated that at least 166,000 hardrock sites in the 12 western states and Alaska pose some kind of risk to public health and safety. The Abandoned Mine Lands website, sponsored by a coalition of federal agencies, tallies both the number of abandoned sites and the level of risk on a state-by-state basis. California, for example, has 520 abandoned mines on BLM lands, 120 of which have "high risk" openings. In Colorado the numbers are 2,751 and 10,818. Nevada tops the charts with 166,000 abandoned mines and 50,000 hazardous openings. I can vouch for at least a dozen I saw at Treasure Hill more than a decade ago, where slippery rock mounds surrounded vertical shafts centered like black holes in a spiral galaxy. *Caveat viator!*<sup>3</sup>

Striking the right balance among competing public and private interests has always been difficult in a democratic society. So is trying to find a middle ground between risk and reward. For anyone interested in mining and its impact on people, places or events, abandoned mining landscapes are cultural resources that need protecting as well as reclaiming. People need to be protected from potential hazards, but historic landscapes also need to be protected from vandals and trespassers with metal detectors and

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## Abandoned Mines...

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shovels. A Canadian economist in 1992, writing on a global problem, opined that “[i]f you put copyright crime, theft, [and] fraud together with the illegal importation of antiquities and art theft and fraud... the war on drugs is small material.”<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of motives or purpose, field work at an abandoned mine site poses safety and security concerns for visitors, as well as for developers and property owners. Few would question the importance of removing or capping hazardous waste, plugging dangerous shafts and decrepit portals, stabilizing impound dams and disturbed colluvium, detoxifying containment ponds, and preventing AMD discharge into ground and surface water supplies. But stripping a historic site bare of surface features and prohibiting all public access may go beyond the bounds of reasonable risk aversion. Mining landscapes remind us of the risks and dangers inherent in the mining business. They also provide symbols of “the turmoil between what our culture elects to view as two opposing forces: culture and nature,” as Richard Francaviglia points out in his evocative study of America’s “hard places.”<sup>5</sup> As a mining historian, “walking the turf” to me seems an essential component of understanding how places and people interact in any particular time frame, past or present. Without risks there are few rewards, in business, in academia, or in life.

*Ron Limbaugh, MHA President*

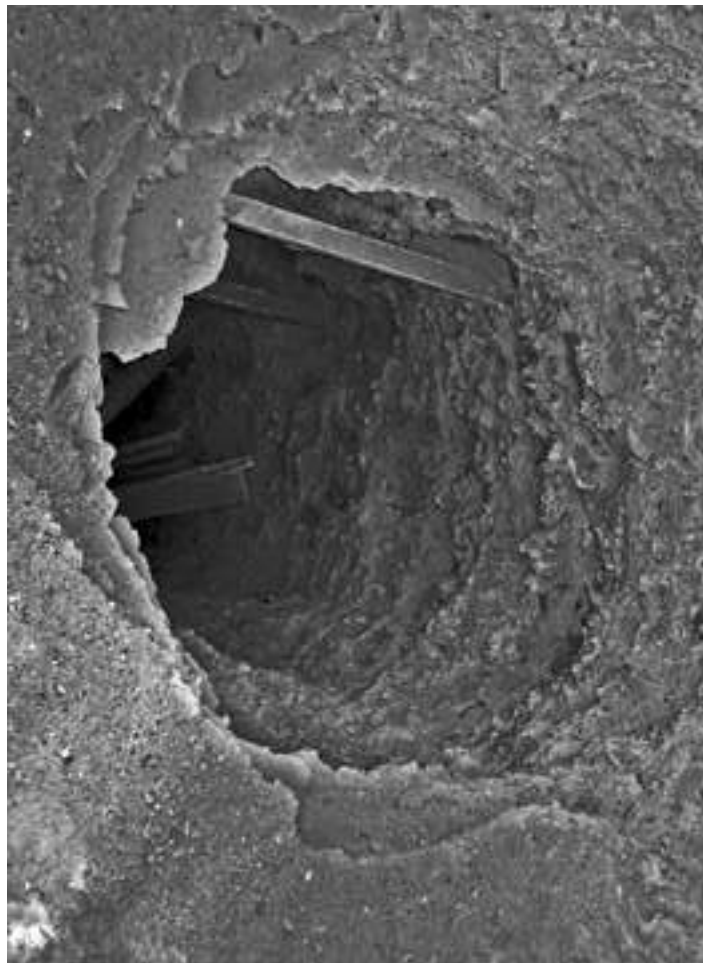
1. The Washington Post, 19 May 2008, p. A14, online at <http://www.lexisnexis.com>

2. Sunday Times (South Africa) 22 July 2007, p. 5; Bristol Evening Post, 19 January 2007, p. 82; The West Australian (Perth), 28 December 2007, p. 17; all online at <http://www.lexisnexis.com>

3. US Dept. of Labor, Mine Safety and Health Administration, online at <http://www.msha.gov/SOSA/SOSAhome.asp>; see also GAO testimony at <http://www.gao.gov> and abandoned mines data at <http://www.abandonedmines.gov>

4. Quoted by Lisa J. Borodkin in “The Economics of Antiquities Looting and a Proposed Legal Alternative,” Columbia Law Review 95 (March 1995): 377, online at <http://www.lexisnexis.com>

5. Richard V. Francaviglia, Hard Places: Reading the Landscapes of America's Historic Mining Districts (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 215.



*Open Abandoned Mine Shaft in Nevada. Photo by Ron Limbaugh.*

### Newsletter Contributions Welcome!

Do you have a piece of research that is interesting, but much too short for the *Mining History Journal*? News about an upcoming conference or event related to mining history? A tip about a "hidden gem" of an archive? Consider sending it to the *Mining History News*! We are always looking for information of interest to our fellow members.

Contact Newsletter Editor Eric Nystrom at [eric.nystrom@rit.edu](mailto:eric.nystrom@rit.edu) for further details.

# MHA Conference a Success on the Iron Range

Erik Nordberg

The 19th annual Mining History Association conference in Northern Minnesota was a great success. The conference attracted just over 125 registrants, not including the special keynote speakers and award winners who participated in specific special events. 32 speakers shared information on a broad range of topics – many about Minnesota's iron mining heritage, but also presentations on mining in the larger Lake Superior region, and additional topics from across the continent and the world. Incoming MHA president Ron Limbaugh urged 75 attendees at his presidential luncheon to get involved with improvements in the association, and keynote speaker Marvin Lamppa shared his thoughts on "Minnesota Iron: The Human Dimension" to a crowd of nearly 90 at the annual awards banquet.

Awards were presented as follows: the 2008 MHA Research Award was given to Brian Leech, the 2008 Cherry Hunter Award was presented to Susan Robinson, the 2008 John Townley Award was presented to Roger Burt, and the 2008 Rodman Paul award was presented to Robert Trennert.

Conference tours proved to be of interest, too. 42 people took part in a preconference tour of the Hill Annex Mine State Park, which included a pontoon boat ride through one of the park's flooded mine pits with beautiful sunshine and blue skies. Cooler weather (and a bit of rain) didn't keep more than 80 participants from the extensive grounds of the Minnesota Museum of Mining on Friday. Regular museum staff were joined by retirees from local mining operations and provided incredible perspective on the museum's many pieces of historic mine equipment. An optional Sunday tour attracted more than 60 individuals (and a few stragglers who had to head south midday) and featured an extensive tour of the Soudan Mine Underground State Park and several mining sites in Ely.

Perhaps the best single event may have been the Thursday evening opening reception at the Hull Rust Overlook north of Hibbing. More than 100 folks

convened on the edge on operating open pit mine and shared great food, beverages and social time.

Chisholm Mayor Michael Jugovich and Hibbing Councilor Dan Marich welcomed MHA members to Minnesota and Marty Vadis from the Minnesota Division of Lands & Minerals shared the latest plans for extending active mining along the Mesabi Range.

All registrants had full access to the impressive facilities at Ironworld, host site for the 2008 conference. The Ironworld theatre proved an ideal setting for our main session presentations, outdoor and indoor exhibits provided information and context to other conference content, and meals and refreshments at the breaks were tasty. Many enjoyed a ride on the museum's operating electric trolley, while others took time to undertake research in the Iron Range Research Center.

Iron Range Resources provided financial support for the conference, with the remainder of costs covered through registration fees. Although some final details still need to be worked out, a small profit will be returned to the MHA general fund.

Special thanks are in order to the staff at Ironworld (particularly Debra Rowbottom, Marcia Pandolfini, Ed Pietila and Ed Powers), staff and tour guides at the Hill Annex Mine State Park and Soudan Underground Mine State Park, Shubat Transportation, The Canopy Shop, the kitchens of Jimmy's, Valentini's, Sulu's and Ironworld, Carol Borich and all of the volunteers at the Minnesota Museum of Mining, as well as the many volunteers of the Ely-Hinton Historical Society.

Erik Nordberg and Jane Nordberg served as conference co-organizers, while the program committee consisted of Dawn Bunyak and Pat Clune, with Barbara Clements chairing this important part of the conference work. Additional assistance was provided by Mark Langenfeld, Eric Nystrom, Lawrence Sommers, Doug Learmont, Barry Frey, and MHA treasurer Jay Fell.

# **Call for Presentations**

## **20th Annual Mining History Association Conference**

**June 5-6, 2009  
Creede, Colorado**

The program sessions chair Bill Culver invites proposals for individual presentations or complete sessions (including chair) on any topic or aspect of mining history. Sessions normally include three papers of twenty minutes each. There are no temporal or geographic limits. Presentations tied to the Creede mining district are especially welcome. Ed Raines is the program local arrangements chair.

Proposals should include title of presentation, an abstract (not to exceed one page) for each presentation, plus biographical information about each presenter, including mailing/email address. Please note, speakers must register for the conference in order to give their presentations. Please send the written proposals to the program sessions committee chair by November 30, 2007. Submission by email attachment is preferred.

Bill Culver, Program Sessions Chair  
154 Big Hill Road  
Mooers Forks, NY 12959  
william.culver@plattsburgh.edu

# MHA Officers, Board, and Committees for 2008-09

## Officers 2008-9

Ron Limbaugh, president  
Eleanor Swent, past-president  
Karen Vendl, vice-president  
James E. Fell, treasurer  
Dawn Bunyak, secretary

## Councilors 2008-9

Barbara Clements, 2006-2009  
Mark Langenfeld, 2006-2009  
Robert Otto, 2006-2009  
Keith Long, 2007-2010  
Mark Vendl, 2007-2010  
William Culver, 2008-2011  
Peter Maciulaitis, 2008-2011

## Board Members 2008-9

Eric and Barbara Clements,  
journal editor and compositor  
Diane Dudley, membership chair  
Eric Nystrom, newsletter editor  
Mark Vendl, website liaison

## Nominating Committee 2008-9

Noel Kirshenbaum, Chair, 2008-2011  
Duane Smith, 2006-2009  
Jeremy Mouat, 2007-2010

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Jim Besleme

## Rodman Paul Award

Johnny Johnsson, Chair  
Duane Smith

## Clark Spence Award

David Wolff, Chair  
Bob Spude  
Peter Siems

## Cherry Hunter Award

Mark Langenfeld, Chair  
Silvia Pettem  
Lynn Langenfeld  
Mark and Karen Vendl

## MHA Distinguished Service Award

Ed Raines, Chair  
Ed Hunter  
Lynn & Mark Langenfeld

## MHA Research Grant Award

Robert Otto, Chair  
Ron Limbaugh  
Dawn Bunyak  
Keith Long  
Robert Trennert

## Bylaws Committee

Barbara Clements, Chair  
Ron Limbaugh  
James McBride  
Eleanor Swent

## John Townley Award

James McBride, Chair  
Jay Fell  
Jeremy Mouat  
Duane Smith  
Silvia Pettem

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Mark Langenfeld  
James McBride  
Robert Weldin

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Bill Culver, Sessions Chair  
Local Arrangements:  
Ed Hunter  
Stan Dempsey  
Bill Wahl

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Eric Clements, Chair (ex officio)  
Silvia Pettem  
Ron Brown  
Jay Fell  
Ron Limbaugh  
Jim McBride  
Jeremy Mouat  
Duane Smith

## Mining History on the Internet

The Mining History Association maintains both a website and an email / discussion group forum to encourage the development of mining history on the Internet. At the MHA website, you can find past newsletters, information about joining or renewing membership, and more! Go to:

<http://www.mininghistoryassociation.org>

You can also participate in the continuing discussion of all aspects of mining history by joining the MHA's email list! For instructions on how to subscribe and participate, email:

[MiningHistoryAssociation-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:MiningHistoryAssociation-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

## Colorado School of Mines Library To Build Mining Law History Collection With New Endowment

The Society of Mining Law Antiquarians, in partnership with the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation, has established a new endowment at Colorado School of Mines with a \$25,000 contribution to Arthur Lakes Library. The RMMLF matched the Society's initial \$12,500 gift, enabling Mines to build a robust mining law history collection to be housed in its Russell L. and Lyn Wood Mining History Archive.

The Society of Mining Law Antiquarians/Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation Endowed Fund will support the collection of historical materials exploring the origins and evolution of mining law, particularly in the western United States. "This endowment opens new doors for the Wood Mining History Archive," says Library Director Joni Lerud-Heck. "Such a generous investment in the future of Arthur Lakes Library enables us to assemble a comprehensive collection of mining law materials that will serve as an important resource for the entire community."

John Lacy, president of the SMLA, said, "We are delighted to partner with the Rocky Mountain Mineral Law Foundation to contribute to Mines in this way, and glad to play a part in strengthening the School's mining law resources for the benefit of students, faculty, industry and the broader community." Craig Carver, RMMLF president, said, "The Foundation is grateful that Mines has

committed to preserving these original sources of Western history, and we know that many of our members – faculty and lawyers alike – will be among those who make good use of these invaluable materials. We look forward to an enduring collaboration with the SMLA and Colorado School of Mines, and appreciate the opportunity to assist the library."

The Society of Mining Law Antiquarians is an organization of mining lawyers and historians that promotes the preservation of books and materials related to the history of mining law. The RMMLF is a Colorado-based nonprofit educational organization that provides scholarly research on the laws and issues affecting domestic and international mineral and water resources. Arthur Lakes Library serves the Colorado School of Mines community and the general public, housing technical materials to support teaching and research in engineering and the applied sciences. The Russell L. & Lyn Wood Mining History Archive houses non-circulating collections of books, journals and other materials that cover mining history throughout the world, with emphasis on the Rocky Mountain region. The mining law collection is the newest addition to the archive's special collections. For more information on Arthur Lakes Library, see [www.mines.edu/library](http://www.mines.edu/library). To contribute to the SMLA/RMMLF Endowed Fund, contact the Colorado School of Mines Foundation at 303-273-3275.

### Sign Up For 8th IMHC: Cornwall, June 2009

The Eighth International Mining History Congress will be held June 12-15, 2009, in Great Britain. Sessions will be held in Redruth, at the center of the once large and highly influential copper and tin mining industry of Cornwall and West Devon. From here labor and mining expertise was exported to the world, and much of the surviving landscape has recently been accorded UNESCO World Heritage status. This Congress follows on previous meetings, the first of which was held in Australia in 1985, then Germany in 1989, the United States in 1994, Mexico in 1998, Greece in 2000, Japan in 2003, and India in 2007. The Congress is being organized under the auspices of the University of Exeter in Cornwall and the Geevor Mining Museum. For additional information, please visit the conference website:

<http://www.huss.ex.ac.uk/history/imhc/index.php>

## Four Honored by MHA For Contributions To Mining History

A highlight of the annual conference is the presentation of the Mining History Association's awards. **Brian Leech** received the 2008 MHA Research Award, intended to foster original investigation or the presentation of original historical research. **Susan Robinson** was presented the Cherry Hunter Award for mining-related artwork. **Roger Burt** received the John Townley Award for the best article in the previous year's *Mining History Journal*. **Robert Trennert** was granted the 2008 Rodman Paul Award, recognizing a record of outstanding contributions to the field of mining history.

We congratulate the 2008 winners, and thank them for their contributions to the field of mining history and the Mining History Association!

### Spence Committee Seeks Nominations For Best Book on Mining History, 2007-08

The Clark C. Spence Award Committee is now accepting nominations for the best book published on Mining History during 2007-2008. The committee considers books that meet the documentation and narrative standards set by the works of Clark Christian Spence, professor emeritus, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. To be considered, the book must focus on the history of a specific mining region, or a mining-related theme or topic, especially within the American West, or an individual or individuals prominent in the history of American mining. There are no temporal limits on subjects. The book must be published either in the year 2007 or 2008.

Authors or publishers should send three copies of the nominated work to the Spence Committee at the following address:

David Wolff  
attn. MHA Spence Award  
Black Hills State University  
1200 University St, Unit 9059  
Spearfish, SD 57799

*Mining History Association*  
P.O. Box 552  
Sedalia, CO 80135

## **First Class Mail**

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### **Upcoming Events**

#### **48th Annual Western History Conference**

October 22-25, 2008

Salt Lake City, UT

<http://www.umsl.edu/~wha/>

#### **20th Annual Mining History Conference**

June 4-6, 2009

Creede, CO

<http://www.mininghistoryassociation.org>

#### **2009 Vernacular Architecture Forum: "Mining Metropolis: An Island in a Stockmen's Paradise"**

June 10-13, 2009

Butte, MT

<http://www.vafweb.org>

#### **8th International Mining History Conference**

June 12-15, 2009

Redruth, Cornwall, Great Britain

<http://www.huss.ex.ac.uk/history/imhc/index.php>

#### **10th Cultural Heritage Symposium on Mining, Metallurgy, and Geosciences**

September 29-October 2, 2009

Freiberg, Saxony, Germany

The *Mining History News* is published quarterly by the Mining History Association. It is sent to MHA members who also receive the annual *Mining History Journal*. MHA is an organization of individuals interested in the history of mining and metallurgy. Submissions for the newsletter are encouraged and should be sent to Eric Nystrom at the MHA address or by email: [eric.nystrom@rit.edu](mailto:eric.nystrom@rit.edu).

Deadlines:            March issue: February 15  
                              June issue: May 15  
                              September issue: August 15  
                              December issue: November 15

Change of Address: Please send all address changes to Diane Dudley, Membership Chair, at:

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