

cable for hoisting in the deeper mines at Virginia City. The Comstock became the showplace of Western mining by utilizing the most advanced mining techniques available.

The Comstock Lode produced gold and silver valued at more than \$105 million in 1873-82; moreover, in 1874-81, \$74,250,000 was paid in dividends. Besides Hearst, others who reaped these rewards included the four bonanza kings, John W. Mackay, James G. Fair, James C. Flood, and William S. O'Brien (all from penniless Irish backgrounds); William C. Ralston, founder of the Bank of California; and a San Francisco financier, Alvinia Hayward.

Although relatively short-lived, the Comstock Lode generated important ramifications. Politically, the huge output of silver was a major factor in the movement to establish parity with gold in the Nation's currency. Technologically, the increased geological understanding of veins and the development of large-scale deep mining contributed to the revival of quartz mining in California and the beginning of underground mining in Utah and Nevada. These factors also inspired a boom in underground mining in Montana, Idaho, and the Southwest.

In 1866, as one of Nevada's first U.S. Senators, William M. Stewart maneuvered through Congress a lode-claims law that established three major points: First, it gave both retroactive and future sanction to the miners' exploitation of minerals in the public domain; second, it established a procedure for obtaining U.S. patents to mining claims; and third, it specified that existing local arrangements were to be respected and continued. (Similar laws applying to placer claims were passed in 1870.) In 1872, a revision listed the information required for local records, described how claims should be marked, and specified the minimum amount of work on a claim to avoid forfeiture. The revision also ruled that a lode claimant must locate his surface boundaries so as to embrace the apex of the vein. If he succeeded, he could follow the vein through the side limits of his rectangular claim (but not through the end limits) as they extended downward from the surface. This "Apex Law" led to millions of dollars of litigation regarding the geologically uncertain questions of whether the apex of a claim was within the boundaries and what parts of a deposit could be considered a downward extension of the apex. When replacement deposits became economically important, the words of the statute had to be bent to include a type of deposit not foreseen by Congress.

Near the end of the 1870's, Congress created a Public Lands Commission to investigate the public lands and land laws of the West. Although the local laws had been sufficient when mineral lands were not crowded and no alternative existed, the commission concluded that these laws had outrun their usefulness and should be abolished. Evidence revealed an extraordinary contrast in the cost and frequency of litigation in the mineral lands east and west of the Missouri River, and the commission blamed this on imperfections of local laws and the apex provision. Congress did not enact the major changes proposed by the commission, but the way was opened for a gradual displacement of these codes by a growing body of State and territorial legislation.

## Colorado

Stories about Arapahoe Indians who shot golden bullets, an old mountain man who stumbled on a fabulous mine, and a trapper who returned to Missouri with gold nuggets kept alive rumors of a very rich mine in Colorado. The first recorded strike was made in the spring of 1850 when a party of miners bound for California stopped to try their luck on Ralston Creek on the South Fork of the Platte River. They found some gold, but not enough to detain them. A Cherokee Indian named John Beck who was with the group returned there with a Georgian, William Green Russell, in June 1858. Beck, Russell, and 70 other Indians and Georgians struck gold about 8 miles above the mouth of Cherry Creek. Later, they were joined by a group from Lawrence, Kans., led by J. H. Tierney, who formed the St. Charles Town Association and laid out a town east of the junction of Cherry Creek and the South Platte. Shortly afterward, another group from Missouri and eastern Kansas organized the Auroria Town Co. Interest then switched from gold mining to real estate speculation. In November, another party arrived from Leavenworth, Kans., under the leadership of William Larimer. Realizing that the two best townsites had already been claimed, Larimer appropriated the lands of the St. Charles Co. (since most of that party had returned to the East) and organized the Denver City Co. All this was in expectation of an influx of prospectors to the Pike's Peak country.

The speculators had guessed right. The Panic of 1857 provided the proper setting to promote the famous Pike's Peak gold rush. A barrage of propaganda spread through the Mississippi Valley when a trader who had visited the Russell party on the South Platte arrived in Kansas City with a sackful of gold dust. Disappointment and tragedy followed. The hopeful youths, needy farmers, and unemployed shopkeepers who responded were inexperienced as prospectors and miners and lacked the necessary financial backing. Many did not survive the trip to the Rockies. Most of those who did regretted their own gullibility and returned home cursing guidebook writers and Denver land speculators.

In January 1859, as the first "Pike's Peak or Bust" movement subsided, a Missourian, George A. Jackson, discovered placer gold on Chicago Creek, a small tributary of Clear Creek near the future site of Idaho Springs. He kept his secret until late April, when he returned to his strike with a few companions to operate a cradle. Shortly after, gold was found at Gold Hill in Boulder Canyon also. Neither Chicago Creek nor Gold Hill proved very rich, but they revived general optimism.

John S. Gregory found a rich outcrop of gold-bearing quartz on the North Branch of Clear Creek, at a place later named Gregory Gulch and presently the site of Black Hawk, Colo. Soon after, the hillsides along Clear Creek were covered with miners. Gregory sold his claim for \$21,000 and accepted a fee of \$100 per day to prospect for others.

Early mining concentrated where Gregory and Jackson had made their discoveries in Gilpin County, which became as well-known to miners as Nevada County in California and Storey County in Nevada. Located at an altitude of