Presidential Pickings

My neighbor proudly displays a beautifully scripted sign in her living room that says: “If you’re lucky enough to live in Midas, you’re lucky enough.” The eclectic residents of this remote hamlet might not agree on everything, but we all agree on that sentiment. Midas has most of the amenities for a comfortable life – power, water, internet, neighborhood bar – but houses are in short supply. Property rarely comes up for sale; it usually passes from generation to generation. For the 13 of us who are lucky enough to live here year-round, this old mining town is golden, even without a grocery store or gas station.

Located in the southwestern corner of Elko County, Nevada, Midas was established in 1907 after a gold discovery set off the usual scurrying excitement. The Gold Circle Mining District was formed with an anchoring township of the same name, but the U.S. Post Office would not allow the post office to be similarly dubbed. Too many Nevada towns with “gold” in their names, declared the federales. After considering other options, such as “Porphyry,” local boosters landed on “Midas.” The mining district is still Gold Circle, but the town is Midas.

Over the past century-plus, Midas has been the center of four distinct mining productive eras. The initial boom lasted about six years, with an average of 10 mines producing nearly 19,000 ounces of gold and 42,000 of silver. With the development of local mills, the second six-year phase yielded substantial production: 60,000 ounces of gold and 846,000 of silver. The longest productive phase began in 1927 and closed with the 1942 War Board Order, although the major company in the district had already busted. During that time, the district reported 50,000 ounces of gold and 755,000 ounces of silver. After 1942, Midas became much better known as a place to hunt deer and chukar than a place to hunt precious metals. Improved technology brought mining/milling back to the area in 1999 with the construction of the Ken Snyder Mine and Midas Mill. That world-class underground operation produced more gold and silver in its first year than the entire district did in the preceding 90 years. It’s now in care and maintenance.

The early mines with colorful names – the Bamberger, the Eastern Star, the Rex, the Judge, the Esmeralda – were essentially scratches in the ground as the first miners exploited the most accessible ore and hauled it by horse-drawn wagons to the Red House Railroad Station, 20 miles away. The first mill of any useful size was built in 1909 and was operated by Josephine Geyman for nearly 20 years. Staked in 1907, the Elko Prince Mine soon became the consistent producer in the district. Located a few miles from town, it offered its own housing for miners and their families and had its own mill.

In 1914, John Rice finally hit paydirt in the Hardscrabble Mine, and Elko was abuzz over a display of fist-sized gold nuggets. Certain of their success, John and Emma Rice had already built the biggest house in Midas. (None of the town’s homes were ever grand in the sense of more established mining communities.) But the excitement was too much for John. He dropped dead within a month of the discovery and was buried in the Midas Cemetery. Emma continued to operate the Hardscrabble and lived quite well for many years until she vanished into the mists with a new husband, leaving behind a handsome house that intrigued inquisitive teenagers and John’s solitary headstone in the Midas Cemetery.
When the Gold Circle Consolidated Mill poured its first gold bar in 1927, the town celebrated with a big dance attended by 400 people, including Nevada’s Governor Fred Balzar. Most of the district’s mines had been consolidated into one company by Nevada State Senator and Republican National Committeeman Noble Getchell, and he was often accompanied to Midas by politicians, such as California’s Governor and Nevada’s U.S. Senators. Former heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey hung out here one summer. According to the newspapers, he was training for a comeback; according to locals, he was visiting a girlfriend.

Although mining continued on a small scale after the 1942 Order, Midas became a quiet place where the number of full-time residents steadily dwindled to a handful. Second homes became more common than primary residences, and the weekend population can soar to 100 or more. In the process, old buildings (like the Rice House) made way for new cabins, and metal was scrapped. Today the town looks very different than it did in 1927.

Recently, as the MHA Council pondered the location for the 2026 conference, one of the members gave an impassioned plea for a location with many historical mining artifacts still standing in the wild. I realized that my little town would not meet that standard. Located in a canyon with old stands of cottonwood trees, Midas is a lovely place. Homes are clean and tidy, and the Midas Bighorn Saloon is a welcoming watering hole. But most of the artifacts are gone. Recent mining activities reshaped the Elko Prince site; the local assay office and schoolhouse burned years ago; headframes vanished over time; and mining shacks have been replaced with mobile homes. Although the saloon qualifies for historic status, having been built around 1956, the current building replaced the store and saloon that stood on the site during mining’s heyday. Even the Midas Cemetery’s historic offerings are scant with only three surviving headstones, including John Rice’s.

A handful of mining artifacts do remain in the area. Concrete and iron detritus marks the site of Mrs. Geyman’s mill, and the foundations of the 75-ton Gold Circle Consolidated Mill can be explored. One lone chute from a 1950s speculative mine still stands above town. Small waste dumps dot the flanks of Midas Mountain. The windowless jail, built in 1908, still stands, and the playground equipment, installed in the early 1930s, still entertains kids of all ages.

I am, indeed, lucky enough to live in this old mining town, as we affectionately refer to it, but like many mining towns in the 21st century American West, its tangible heritage is found only in photographic form and memories captured by the local historic preservation organization. (Now in its 30th year, Friends of Midas has been doing just that.) One of the great joys of participating in MHA’s annual conference is the opportunity to tour what’s left of this country’s mining heritage, but I fear that future tours will become more ghostly and less tangible. Midas is a wonderful place to visit, but we’ll need to be content with exploring photographs rather than ruins. A cold beer in the almost-historic saloon will make that option a bit more palatable.

Josie Geyman’s Mill featured 10 stamps. (Photo courtesy of Friends of Midas)
Many dances, parties, and vaudeville acts took place in the Midas Dance Hall, photographed by Nell Murbarger in 1952. It was replaced with a county-owned fire station in 1991. (Photo courtesy of Stanley Paher)

Left: The Gold Circle Consolidated’s 75-ton cyanide mill with the Grant Mine on the right, c. 1935. (Photo courtesy of Northeastern Nevada Historical Society.)

Right: Midas in the spring of 2022. (Photo courtesy of David Morris)

Dana Bennett, MHA President 2023-2024
Midas, Nevada
nevada.historian@gmail.com
MHA Officers and Nominations Committee Report

The Nominating Committee has been busy identifying candidates for VP / President-elect, the MHA Council (three positions), and the Nominating Committee. Thank you to Stephen Hart, Peter Maciulaitis, and Richard Reid for their hard work on this important task. The Committee was able to identify candidates for the positions of VP / President-elect, two of the three positions on the Council, and the Nominating Committee. The third Council position does not currently have a nominated candidate and the MHA is accepting write-in candidates (please note that any write-in candidate should be willing to serve if they receive a majority of the votes for that position). Any questions about the qualifications needed for any of the positions can be addressed by Peter Maciulaitis (pmaciulaitis@aol.com). This year’s ballot can be found at the top of page seven (7) of this newsletter listing the positions with the nominated candidates for each position with room for any write in candidates and a write in slot for the third Council position. Ballots must be mailed as directed by February 28, 2024 in order to be counted.

Nominated for the position of Vice President / President-elect is Robert McQueen. Rob works as Principal Investigator and Project Director with Summit Envirosolutions, Inc., an environmental and cultural resources consulting firm in Reno, Nevada. He has a graduate degree in Industrial Archaeology from Michigan Technological University and has spent nearly 30 years surveying, interpreting, and preserving the material remains of Nevada’s rich mining history. He has written a book and several articles on Nevada’s mining heritage, and he presents frequently at the annual professional conferences he attends. He currently serves on the Mining History Association’s Council and is Treasurer of a local archaeological advocacy group. He helped organize the MHA’s Elko (virtual) conference, is currently assisting with the upcoming Park City conference, and helped organize the SIA’s annual Fall Tour when it came to Reno, Nevada in 2019. Rob states, "I love that the MHA is a mix of historians, people that did or are currently working in mining, and simply folks that appreciate mining and understand its importance to our modern world. I very much want to see our membership grow. I am honored for the consideration of Vice President of this organization."

Nominated for two of the three open positions on the Council are Dan Plazak and Virginia Mclemore.

Dan Plazak is a retired geologist and engineer in Denver, a graduate (he prefers the term “survivor”) of Michigan Tech and the Colorado School of Mines. He is the author of the books A Hole in the Ground with a Liar at the Top (University of Utah Press, 2006) and Doodlebugs and Dowsers (Texas Tech University Press, 2023), as well as articles in the Mining History Annual, Oil-Industry History, and Skeptic magazine. He continues to write on neglected corners of mining history.

Virginia Mclemore is the Principal Senior Economic Geologist with the New Mexico Bureau of Mines and Mineral Resources, a resource division of the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology (NM Tech) and the state geological survey. She was hired in 1980 as an economic geologist by the Bureau. She holds B.S. degrees in Geology and Geophysics and an M.S. in Geology from NM Tech and a Ph.D. in Geoscience from the University of Texas at El Paso in 1993. She is a Certified Professional Geologist (#CPG-7438) with the American Institute of
Professional Geologists. Ginger was recently inducted into the New Mexico Mining Hall of Fame in recognition of her years working with the mining industry.

She is an adjunct professor at NM Tech and teaches New Mexico Mineral Deposits, Geology of the Industrial Minerals, Uranium Geology, Exploration Geochemistry, and Geology of Strategic and Critical Minerals. She has written or co-authored over 400 publications concerning the economic geology of New Mexico.

Nominated to join the Nominating Committee is Karen Jass.

Karen Jass is a graduate of the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology. She is a mining Engineer with 40+ years of surface & underground (ventilation) coal mining experience. She is a 46-yr member of the Society of Mining Engineers, including service as a past Chair of CO Section and the Chair of their Mineral Education Committee. She was an organizer/volunteer for 4 national science teachers conferences compiling/soliciting donated minerals for teacher's mineral kits. She is also a 34-year member of Women in Mining, serving as a National President and continuing to serve as a board member and on its local Education Committee. She is an ~10-year member of the MHA, joining after attending Steve Hart's tour of Trinidad’s historic mining areas.

Karen is a huge advocate for educating the public about the ongoing need for mining to access minerals required for everyday products AND the facts of required reclamation/remediation at all US mines. She loves learning about diverse mining types including the early and ongoing innovations of miners and mining technology advances. She has "enlightened" her husband (a ChemE by training), so he's now actively aware of mining (current and historic) activities & processes, including what MHA offers on an annual basis.

Join the Mining History Association in Park City, Utah

34th Annual Conference, June 5-9, 2024
Preliminary details available on the MHA's website at:
https://www.mininghistoryassociation.org/ParkCity2024.htm
Complete conference details and session program forthcoming in the Spring 2024 Mining History News

Park City Conference Hotel Room Block

Our conference headquarters is The Yarrow Resort by DoubleTree (https://www.yarrowhotelparkcity.com/). We have secured a block of rooms at an attractive conference rate of $169/night (Resort Fee included). Those wishing to book rooms now may call DoubleTree reservations at (435) 649-7000. (Be sure to request the Mining History Association group rate.)
The Nuggets program resumes on January 16th and will run through May. The dates, meeting ID, topic, and presenter names are listed below.

January 16, 2024  
824 8931 8925  
Mine Too: The Female Mine Claim owners of Mineral King, CA 1874–1880  
Laile Di Silvestro

February 20, 2024  
847 5567 2564  
Park City Preview  
Mark Langenfeld

March 19, 2024  
848 3664 1018  
Comstock Reshot  
Kelly Cluer

April 16, 2024  
831 1013 9957  
The Many Myths about Marcus Daly  
Eamon McCarthy

May 14, 2024  
820 5673 0452  
Southwestern Virginia's Historic Mining Areas along the New River Trail  
Michael Kaas

The Nuggets program will resume in the fall and Barbara is currently scheduling speakers. Topics do not need to be academic in nature. Topics can include a visit to a historic mining site or town or an interesting little topic that you happened to find out about. Send an email to mininghistoryassociation@gmail.com if you would like to present an MHA Nugget or if you have questions about the process.

The Livermore and Other Awards

Peter Maciulaitis is seeking candidates for the 2024 John Livermore Award. The award is presented for philanthropy and public service related to mining, reclamation and environmental stewardship, education, and/or historical preservation. The recipient can be an individual, company, or organization. Service can have been performed in any state, but Utah entries are encouraged because the next MHA conference will be held in Park City. Please contact pmaciulaitis@aol.com with the name and background of any proposed candidate.

The other award committees also welcome any nominees for the Association’s many other awards including the Cherry Hunter Award, Clark Spence Award, the MHA Besleme-Orell Heritage Award, the Rodman Paul Award, and the Distinguished Service Award. Please visit the Association’s website for more information about the awards.

Your Membership Status

There have been many questions about paid memberships and membership status. You can find your paid through membership year on the mailing labels for this newsletter and your Mining History Journal. It is the number under your name. You are paid up through December of the year shown.

Attention Potential Conference Vendors

Vendor tables will be available on Friday and Saturday of our Conference (June 7 & 8), at $35 per table. The tables will be in an area upstairs from the conference session room via an adjacent stairway or an elevator. Approximately 15 tables can be secured in this room. There is also an unsecured area outside the room available to additional vendors or for poster sessions. Potential vendors should contact Bob Otto: roto@spe.midco.net or 605-269-1952 by April 1, 2024, for more information or to RSVP.
2023/2024 Ballot
Mail by February 28, 2024 to:
Mining History Association, P.O. Box 1536, Cape Girardeau MO 63702-1536

Vice President / President Elect
○ Robert McQueen ○ ______________________ (write in)

MHA Council Position:
○ Dan Plazak ○ ______________________ (write in)

MHA Council Position:
○ Virgina Mclemore ○ ______________________ (write in)

MHA Council Write In Position:
○ ______________________ (write in)

Nominating Committee:
○ Karen Jass ○ ______________________ (write in)

2024 MHA Membership Renewal


Name:______________________________________________

Business Affiliation (if used for address) _______________________________

Address _________________________________________________________

City __________________________ State _______ Zip _________

Email__________________________________ Phone _____________________

Three areas of mining interest: ______________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

Send with check to: Mining History Association, PO Box 1536, Cape Girardeau MO 63702-1536

OR Go to the MHA Website and use our online system and pay by credit card:
https://mininghistoryassociation.org/member.htm

MEMBERSHIP REMINDER
You are paid up through December of the year printed on your mailing label. If your mailing label says “2023” you need to renew for 2024.
The *Mining History News* is published quarterly by and for the members of the *Mining History Association*. Submissions for the newsletter are encouraged.

**Deadlines:**
- Spring issue: February 15th
- Summer issue: June 15th
- Fall issue: September 15th
- Winter issue: December 15th

Submissions for the newsletter should be sent to Paul R. Spyhalski at prspyhal@yahoo.com with MHA at the start of the subject line.

**Change of address:** Please send all address changes to Barbara Clements, Membership Chair, at mininghistoryassociation@gmail.com or Mining History Association PO Box 1536 Cape Girardeau MO 63702-1536

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**Upcoming Events**

**Anthracite Mining History Month**
Various Locations (luzernehistory.org)
January 2024

**Australasian Mining History Conference**
Leonora, Western Australia.
September 7-15, 2024

**Society for Industrial Archeology**
Minneapolis, Minnesota
May 15-19, 2024

**Mining History Association Conference**
Park City Utah
June 5-9, 2024

**Western History Association**
Kansas City, Missouri
October 24-27, 2024

**Mining History Association Conference**
Gunnison, Colorado
June 11-16, 2025