

# LEADVILLE, COLORADO

by **John M. Shannon**  
Leadville, Colorado

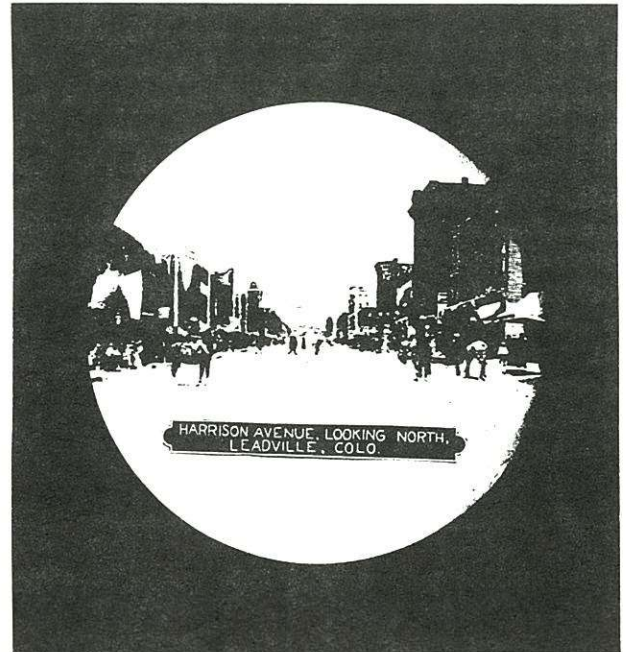
and **Geraldine C. Shannon**  
Leadville, Colorado

The town of Leadville is located on the western edge of the Leadville mining district, on the western slope of the Mosquito Range, in Lake County, Colorado, about 128 km (80 miles) southwest of Denver. Altitudes range from 3,070 to 4,000 meters (10,000 to 13,000 feet), and the mountain scenery in that area of Colorado is spectacular. Leadville is one of Colorado's great mining districts, with a long and complex history.

In 1859, those who found themselves left out at Mountain City and other Gilpin County, Colorado mines continued to push relentlessly onward. Prospectors, their numbers fed by the thousands who flocked to the West in the aftermath of the terrible financial panic of 1857, pressed forward throughout the summer and fall of 1859. Into areas now known as Georgetown, Boulder, Gold Hill, Tarryall, Fairplay and over the low divide into Arkansas Valley they drove, always in search of the yellow metal. When winter came they returned to Auraria and Denver to wait for another season to continue the search.

Finally, on February 15, 1860, A. G. (Al) Kelley (sometimes spelled Kelly) led 25 men from Auraria via Colorado City and Ute Pass across South Park, over the Mosquito Range to the west, probably via Trout Creek Pass, to the upper Arkansas River to a spot he had prospected the previous fall. This first group to work the Arkansas River chose a site that was approximately 20 miles south of present-day Leadville; they called it "Kelley's Diggings," "Kelleysburg" or "Kelley's Bar" (Smiley, 1901; Blair, 1980).

Meanwhile, another miner who had also prospected the Arkansas Valley briefly that fall of 1859 told S. S. Slater in Mountain City (near what is now Central City) of a rich placer he had located. As a result, a small party from Mountain City journeyed down Bear Creek, up the South Platte and across South Park to the Mosquito Range and entered the area near the present-day Granite. Because their information indicated that they should continue north, this



A mirror-back showing Harrison Avenue, Looking North, Leadville, Colo. The mirror is 2 1/4 inches in diameter. (Mark Bohannon collection)

second party did not prospect at Kelley's Bar, but went on.

Several other small groups joined them and they agreed to divide "into three groups: (a) Iowans led by Jones would prospect the first likely gulch, (b) Slater's bunch (later called 'Stevens' group') from Mountain City would prospect the second likely gulch, and (c) a third group, which seems to have been made up of odd lots and led by a stranger named Johnson, would prospect the western side of the valley along the base of Mt. Massive" (Blair, 1980).

Iowa Gulch bears the name the Jones group gave it. Stevens' group prospected a gulch about 1 1/2 miles north of Iowa Gulch, and, finally, Abe Lee found "a pan that promised to make rich men of them all" (Blair, 1980). Soon thereafter this gulch was named California Gulch.

The Johnson party, the third group prospecting, tried their hand in California Gulch, but soon returned to the gulch they had previously worked at the base of Mount Massive. Using a skillet to pan the dirt, they found gold there and named this creek opposite California Gulch, Frying Pan Gulch. (It was later renamed Colorado Gulch [Griswold, 1961].)

Sometime during the first five years of the 1860's, the first and one of the most famous lodes of the Leadville area, the Printer Boy, was discovered in California Gulch. Due to improper management, however, its full potential was not realized until 1868, when large masses of free gold were found.

Once these and other discoveries became known, men flocked in and a "camp" developed. The first unofficial, overall name of the settlement, which was scattered in a most unordered manner for about 6 miles up and down the gulch, was Boughtown, a name of "appearance" (Griswold, 1961). According to the *Daily Chronical* of April 7, 1879, "Men in those days were in too much of a hurry to even build houses to live in; they contented themselves generally with erecting four posts and covering the tops and sides with green pine boughs."

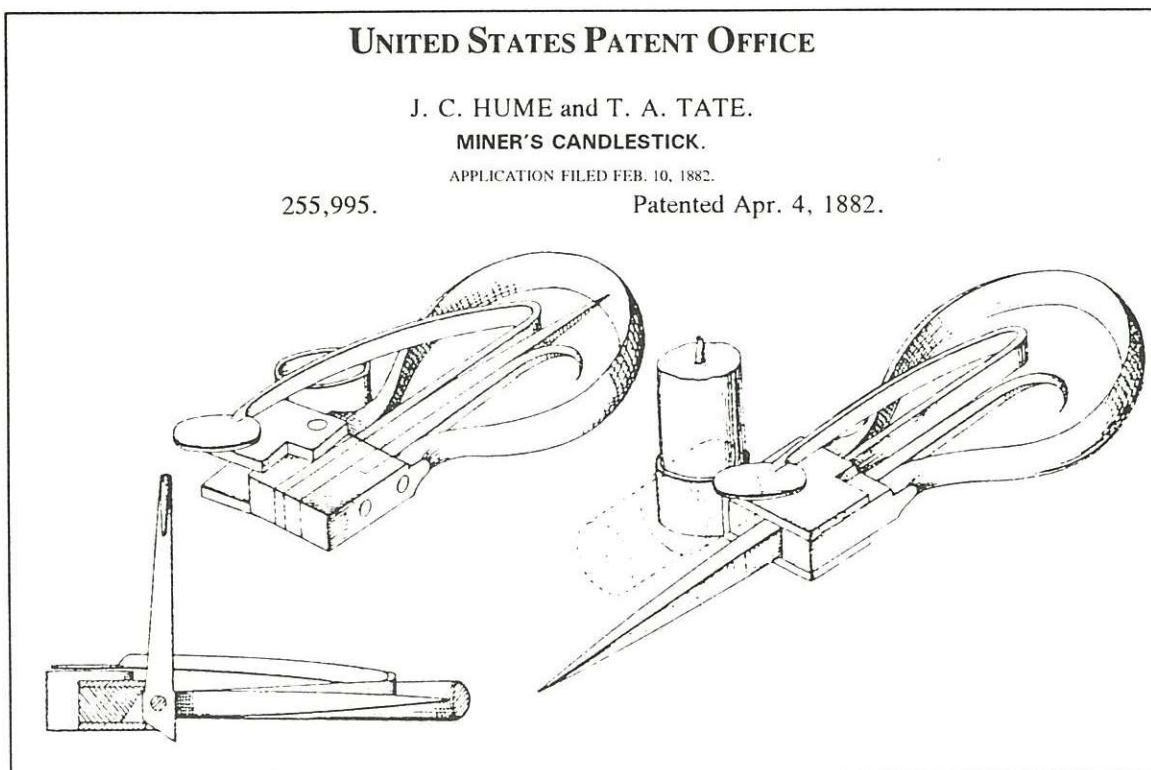
In this area grew "Oro City, as it was finally dubbed, (and it) became the social and economic hub of the area. It had one long main street that ran the length of California Gulch" (Blair, 1980).

The most productive years of placer mining in California Gulch were from 1860 to 1867; however, some placering continued until 1871.

A third period in the history of the area, the carbonate period, began around 1874, when William H. Stevens and Alvinus B. Wood formed a partnership in order to construct a 12 mile ditch to transport water from the Arkansas River to California Gulch to assist with sluicing operations. The ditch "was an immediate success after its completion in 1875, except that Wood and Stevens were plagued with that same black sand that had confounded placer operations in the gulch since those halcyon days of 1860." They collected samples from the gulch; an Alma assayer showed the ore "ran twenty-seven percent lead and fifteen ounces of silver to the ton" (Blair, 1980).

Wood and Stevens kept their discovery a secret until they were able to tie up the major claims. "By the fall of 1875 they controlled a considerable portion of California Gulch" (Blair, 1980). The names of the principal locations were the Dome, Rock, Stone, Lime, Bull's Eye and Iron claims. The ore was first found in place on the Rock claim, where it was over 10 feet thick.

The original patent drawings for the Hume & Tate folding candlestick patented in Leadville, Colorado on April 4, 1882.



"In 1877-78 the greatest rush to any camp in the history of the state occurred, resulting in the building of a new town, called Leadville, seven miles below the old town of Oro" (Henderson, 1926). The name was derived from that decided upon when requesting a new post office for the area in 1877. "Naming the post office did not necessarily name the town, but by the fall of 1877 the name was in general use throughout Colorado. When the city framers met in January of 1878, they had either to approve 'Leadville' or come up with an acceptable substitute." Eventually, "Leadville" was accepted unanimously (Blair, 1980).

It was also in 1878 that two poor German shoemakers, August Rische and George Hook, who had been grubstaked by H. A. W. Tabor (Blair, 1980), "happened to sink a hole where the 'contact' or the mass of the ore approached

the surface and found the ore body on which was developed the Little Pittsburg mine, the foundation of the fortune of H. A. W. Tabor" (Henderson, 1926).

During 1883 "Iron Hill continued to be the largest producing district from the Iron Silver, A. Y., Minnie, Colonel Sellers, Tucson and other mines. The Little Jonny mine was actively worked, the product being silver-lead ores carrying some gold" (Henderson, 1926).

During the period from 1899 to 1915, zinc became the important mining product of the Leadville area. Zinc mills were established and shipments of zinc sulfides became quite large. Numerous large bodies of zinc carbonate were found in 1910, many in the old workings.

The years between 1918 and 1940 saw many ups and downs in the mining at Leadville. Several small booms took place during these years, brought about by a demand for some of the metals or a chance discovery of a new pocket or small orebody, but these always seemed to play out, resulting in a period of inactivity.

**GURNSEY'S**  
**ROCKY MOUNTAIN VIEWS.**

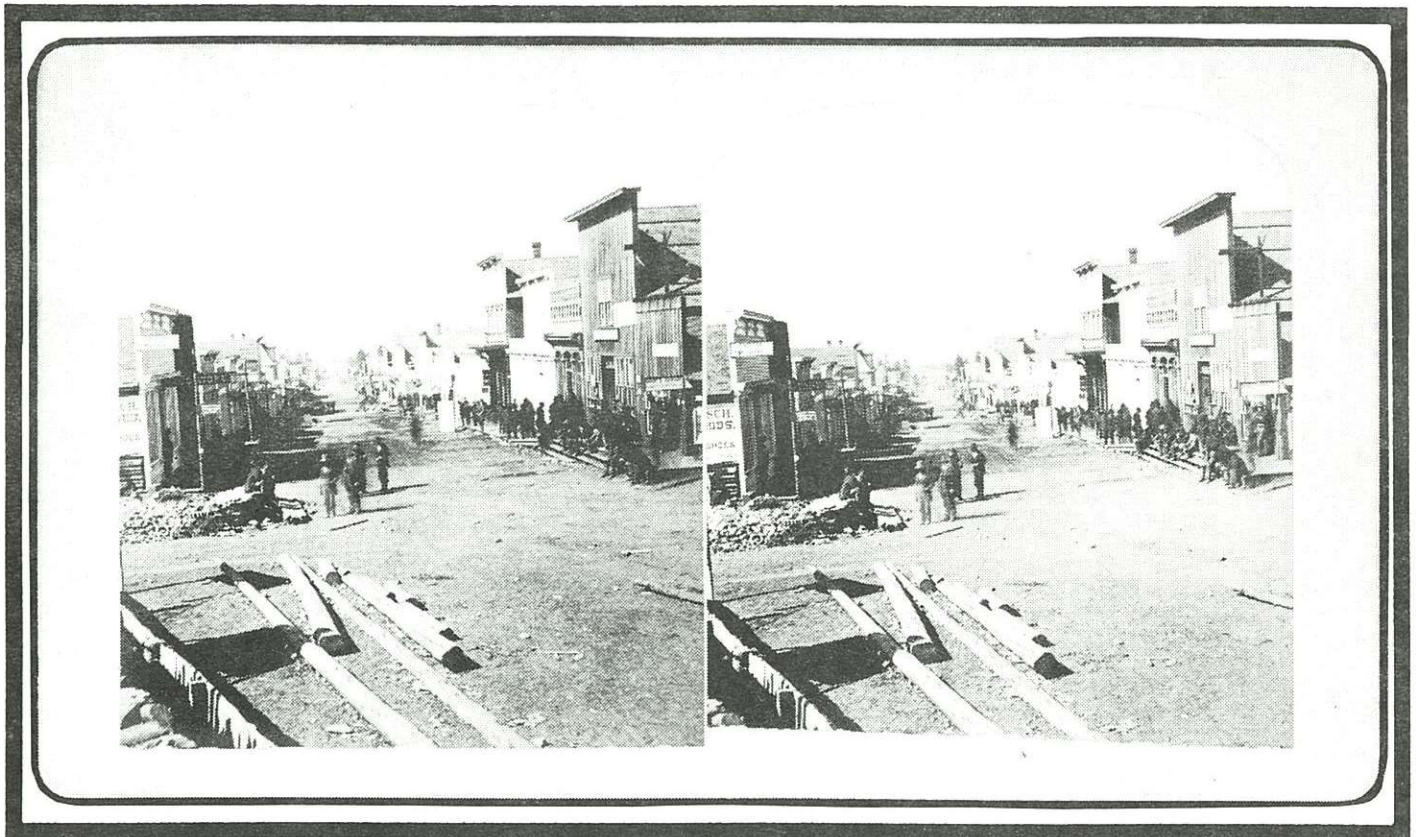
Published at Colorado Springs, Colorado. Pike's Peak Avenue.

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No. **LEADVILLE, COLORADO.**

This, the most important Mining Camp in the State, already has a population of over 6000, although but twelve months old. Four Smelting and two Ore Sampling Works are among its permanent industries, while over three thousand mules and horses are employed in its transportation business. California Gulch, from which \$15,000,000 in gold has been washed since 1869, lies on the south side of the town.

Leadville has an elevation of 10,500 feet above sea level.

An early Gurnsey stereo view of Leadville's main street and the descriptive paper label that is on the reverse of that stereo view which is shown below. (Ted Bobrink collection)



UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE

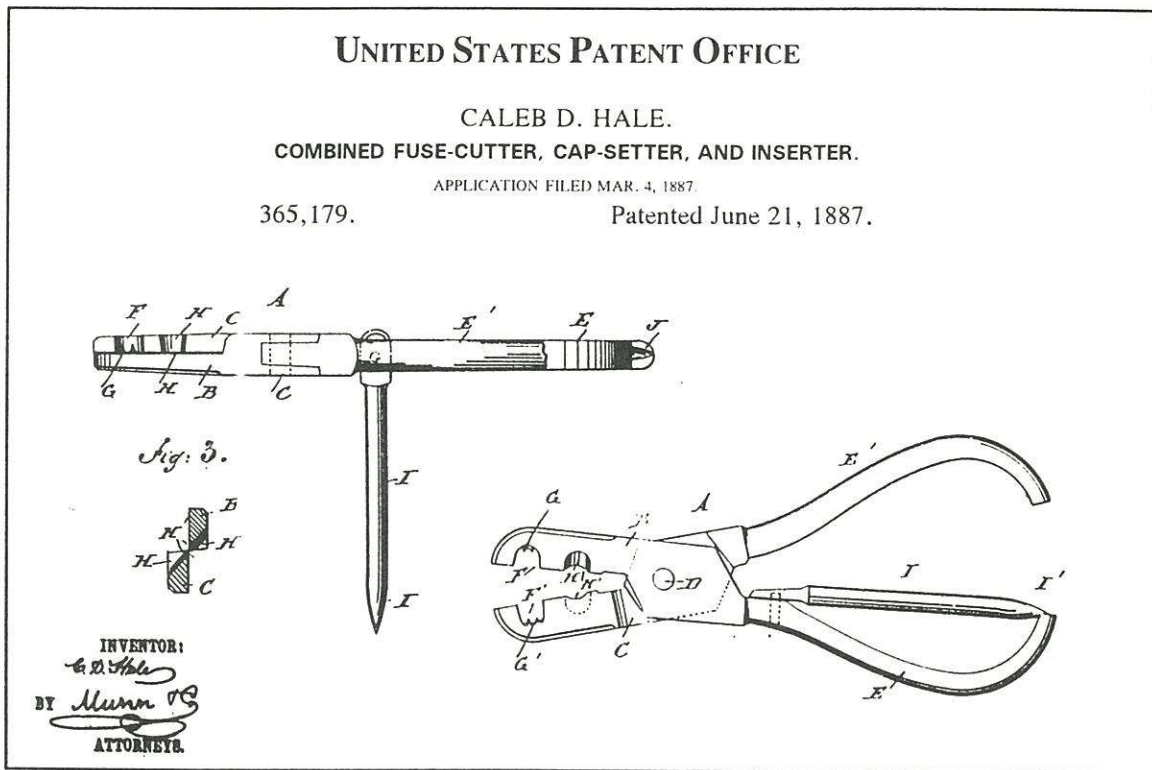
CALEB D. HALE.

COMBINED FUSE-CUTTER, CAP-SETTER, AND INSERTER.

APPLICATION FILED MAR. 4, 1887.

365,179.

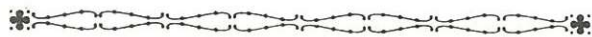
Patented June 21, 1887.



Mining became active once again as a result of the demand for metals during World War II and on into the Korean conflict. In 1943 the government appropriated money for a 4 km drainage tunnel to drain the Leadville district. It was hoped the tunnel would open large deposits of lead, zinc and manganese ores for production, but the project was halted in 1952 because of the rising costs and a decline once again in metal prices.

In recent years mining has been carried on with the discovery of a block of down-faulted ore near the old Black Cloud claim and is being worked through the new Black Cloud shaft.

"In some respects, Leadville is the most remarkable city the world has ever seen" (Ingham, 1880). Certainly it has been able to survive the vicissitudes of fortune for more than a century, and it remains a working monument to mining in Colorado.



GRISWOLD, D. L. and GRISWOLD, J. H. (1951) "Names in the Leadville District." *Carbonate Chronicle*, 7-9.

HENDERSON, C. W. (1926) "Mining in Colorado." U.S.G.S. Professional Paper 138.

INGHAM, G. T. (1880) *Digging Gold Among the Rockies*. Hubbard Brothers, Philadelphia.

SMILEY, J. C. (1901) *History of Denver*. Times-Sun Publication Co., Denver.

Shown above is the original patent drawings for a Combined Fuse-Cutter, Cap-Setter, and Inserter patented on June 21, 1887, by Caleb D. Hale of Leadville, Colorado. This crimper was equipped with a fuse cutter (H), a cap crimper (F) with small "inwardly-projecting tusks or prongs" (G). These small tusks or prongs were designed to indent the cap into the fuse so that the cap could not be removed from the fuse. This crimper also had a tool (I) making a hole in the dynamite stick. This "inserting-tool" was to be used, the handles were opened and the pointed end was swung out at a right angle to the crimper. When the tool was not in use, the pointed end rested in the groove (J) in the outer end of the handle. There no examples of this cap crimping tool known to exist at this time.

This article was excerpted from "The Mines and Minerals of Leadville" published in the *Mineralogical Record*, vol. 16, May-June, 1985, and is used by permission.