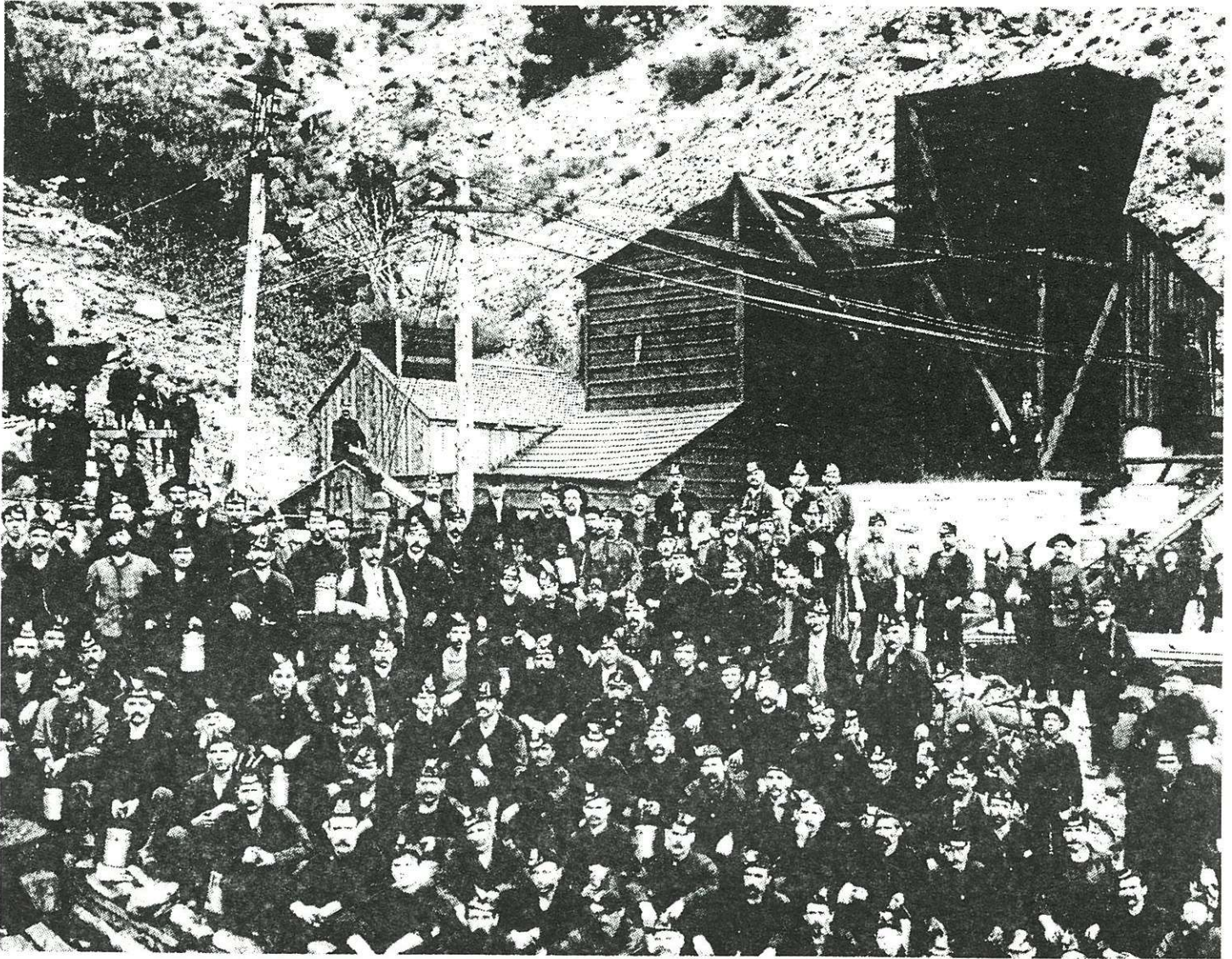


GEORGE EDWARD ANDERSON — WESTERN PHOTOGRAPHER

Deric English



“Coal Miners, Castle Gate, Utah, CA, 1897. Veteran miners remember this equipment -- the number one mine fan house, powered by steam which also generated electricity; the oil wick lamps; and the double-layered lunch pails with water on the bottom and food on top. Near this spot stood the miners’ homes and the RGW depot where Butch Cassidy robbed the mine payroll in 1897.” Description from The Utah Photographs of George Edward Anderson, page 109. (Print from Anderson original glass negative, author’s collection.)

To borrow an overused cliché, a picture is worth a thousand words. As one stares at this miner, lunch bucket and candlestick in hand, one pleads for him to speak. His words could answer so many questions: who are you? where do you work? why aren’t you smiling? Fortunately, studying the clues indicated in this photo may

eventually appease one’s curiosity. As it is, the silence of the miner weaves our imagination through fiction and reality.

One might unravel these bits of information by studying the photographer, George Edward Anderson. He was born October 28, 1860, in Salt

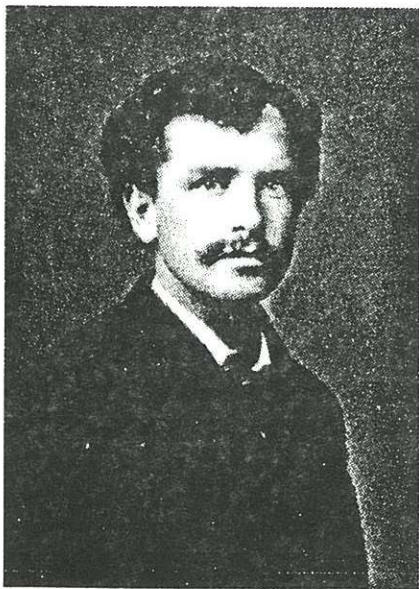
Lake City, Utah. As a teenager, George was an apprentice to the most prestigious photographer in the Utah Territory, Charles R. Savage.

Anderson’s involvement in photography lasted from the mid-1870’s up until his death in 1928. His work has been recognized for its historical

documentation of the Mormon Church, for the thousands of images he took of the common man, and for his images of the Scofield Mine disaster in Utah. Publication and exhibits of Anderson's work by the Smithsonian, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Photokina of Cologne, Germany, and a current exhibit in Italy all attest to the growing appreciation of his work.

Anderson's day to day activities and enthusiasm for capturing the moment reflect his love of history and a strong desire to give something to posterity. At the age of 17, he had his own studio in Salt Lake City. In the 1880's, he established tent studios at Springville, Manti, and Nephi, Utah. He and his portable studio vans and tent galleries made their way through small communities of southern Utah, photographing the common folk. Two-thirds of Anderson's forty thousand photographs are studio portraits similar to that of the miner's photograph. He would move his gallery operations to the mining camps during the winter and arranged such visits to coincide with payday at the mines. A miner would have to pay about twenty-five cents for such a portrait.

(Below) George Edward Anderson, Salt Lake City, Utah, ca, 1884. "One of Anderson's earliest portraits using a gelatin dryplate is this self-image taken around the age of twenty-four." Description from The Utah Photographs of George Edward Anderson, page 3.



(Above) Miner, Utah, Ca, 1885. Hardrock miner posing with candlestick and lunch bucket in hand. (Original photograph in author's collection.)

On May 9, 1928, at the age of sixty-eight, George Edward Anderson died of dropsy, but his contribution to our view of the past has survived. One can be grateful that on many cold winter days, in small Utah communities, he stopped, unloaded, set up his tent, and captured glimpses of the past that would have otherwise been lost forever. If one looks and listens closely, the voice of these images can be heard.

Sources:

Francis, Rell G., The Utah Photographs of George Edward Anderson. University of Nebraska Press, 1979.