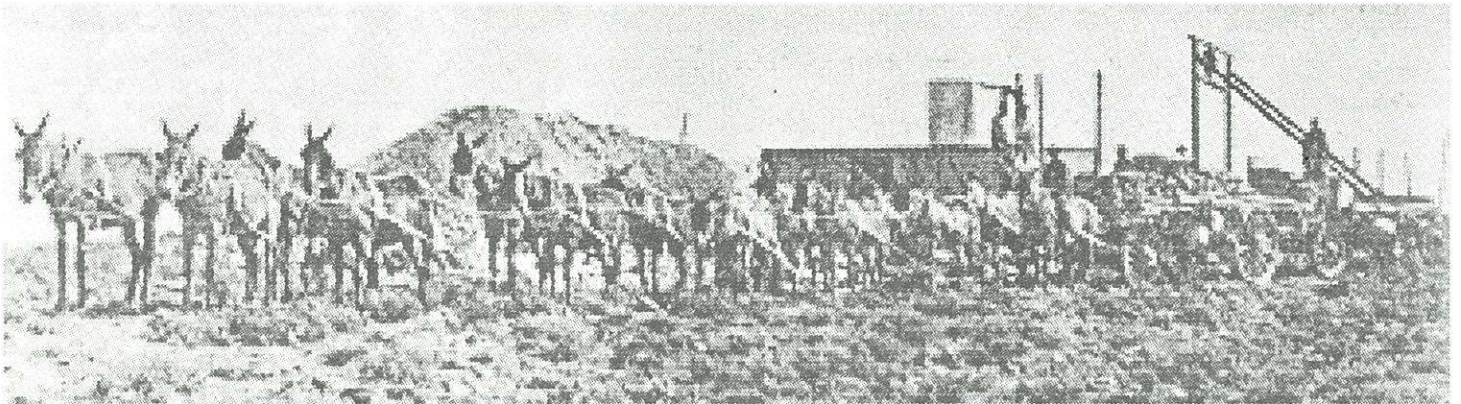


# Goldfield: Nevada's Biggest Gold Camp

by Bob Schroth

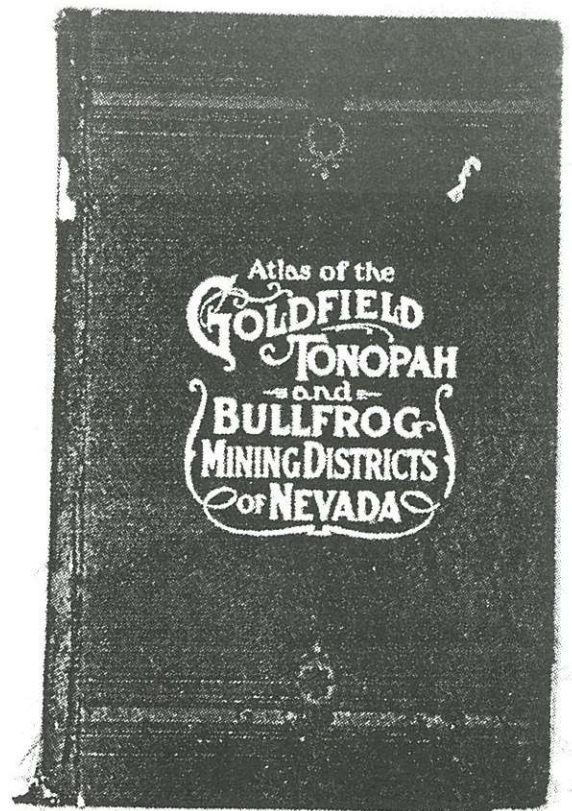


*The Jumbo Mine in 1903 started out with a vein two to twelve feet wide and was soon shipping ore out by mule train valued at \$1000 per ton. By November 1904, over \$1,000,000 had been taken out.*

Of all the mining towns that sprang up in the Nevada desert, Goldfield has one of the most colorful histories. I first visited what is left of this town in 1973. I have made many return trips back to this district to explore above and below ground. Most of the mines of this camp were vertical shafts, some driven to depths of several hundred feet. You can collect the remaining bits of Goldfield's history by seeking out everything from bottles to newspapers and railroad items, to Union and stock certificates.

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What was soon to become The Goldfield district was discovered in Dec. of 1902 by two native Nevadans, Billy Marsh and Harry Stimler. Unsuccessful at Tonopah, they were grubstaked by Jim Butler and the owner of the famous Tonopah club owner Tom Kendall. The men made camp at Rabbit Springs, just west of Goldfield, at the base of the Malapai Mesa. Early in December they found their first ore on the west side of the Columbia Mt. four miles east of their camp. Working in a fierce sandstorm of alkali dust, they discovered gold in the surface dirt. They appropriately named their first claim The Sandstorm.







A 1914 newspaper describes the Jumbo Mine which was booming.

The initial samples assayed at only \$12 per ton, but was composed of almost all gold, something unusual for Nevada, (the Silver State) The discoverers located additional claims, richer ore was found and others soon flocked to the area.

By spring of 1903 a tent camp was formed named Grandpa, the name was chosen because of the optimistic belief that here would be the grand daddy of all mining camps. The district was soon renamed Goldfield. In May of 1903 Al Meyers located the Combination lode, a few weeks later a sensational strike was on the Combination claim. Big investors and money was soon to follow along with a mini gold rush. With the exception of the Combination, all the mines which attained importance were first opened and developed by leasers; so rich were many of these ore bodies that fortunes were made within a few months time. Had leasers not been allowed to work the claims, Goldfield would probably just have been another small Nevada mining camp. In January 1904 the post office was established. Additional saloon men and merchants came along with gamblers, promoters, and of course the girls. Talk of new strikes continually filled the air, Leasers, spurred on by the lure of gold and also pressed by the time limits of their lease agree-



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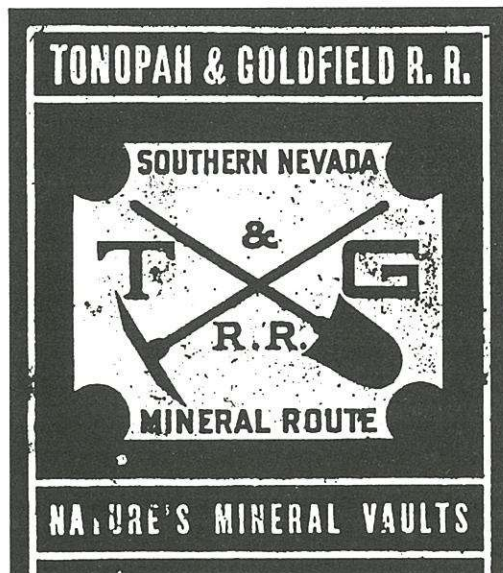
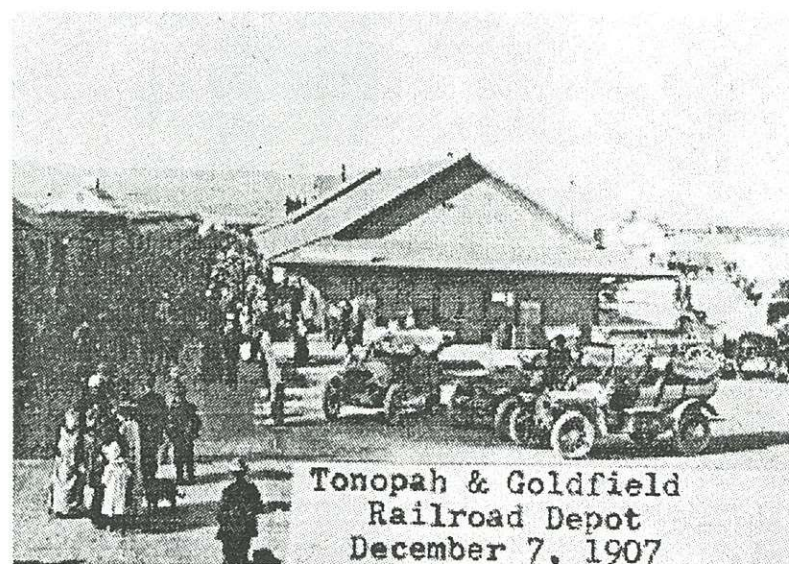


ments worked feverishly on their claims. In midsummer rich ore was being shipped from the Jumbo, Florence, and January mines. At this point the people of Goldfield got their first newspaper, called the Goldfield News. In the summer of 1904 the young camp of Goldfield had a population of 8,000. Every kind of business opened up to serve the throng - from cafes to general stores, saloons to stables.

Most of the leases in the mines expired early in 1905, after well more than a \$1 million had been extracted from the mines. Other leases continued to work, notably the Patrick (\$500,000) and the Florence (\$475,000). Adobe and brick buildings soon began to replace the tents and wooden structures. While many of the mines were already payed out a large strike at the Red Top kept gold fever alive during 1905. Confidence in the district was apparent with the completion of the Tonopah & Goldfield Railroad.

Early in 1906 several new ore bodies were discovered, one ore shoot alone was producing up to \$40,000 a day. The rich ore invited theft and the practice of High Grading became common place, a skillful miner could hide small pieces of ore hidden in false soles of his shoes, picks with false handles, and even hiding it away in a special constructed candle stick with a hollowed out handle. During this time the building boom persisted and late in 1906 the population passed the 15,000 figure and 150 building were constructed in one month, including some imposing brick buildings. Gambling houses, dance halls, and stores of every kind opened their doors to the madding crowd. No one seemed to sleep and the pounding of pianos and the thunderous roar of newly constructed stamp mills roared 24 hours a day. Goldfield was a boom town.

Holidays were highlighted by drilling contests, which tested the strength and stamina of the miners, the champion was declared when one driller could punch a hole into a solid granite block in less time than his opponents. They also had team drilling, "double jacking" and "triple jacking", two men swinging hammers and one changing the increasingly longer steel drills, held in place and turned by a brave man who would hold the drill bit. Blows up to 60 a min. were not uncommon.



During Labor Day of 1906, Tex Rickard of the famous Northern Saloon offered \$20,000 to the boxing managers of "Battling Nelson" and Joe Gans. The ante was soon upped to \$30,000 which was displayed in \$20 gold pieces in the window of Goldfields largest bank, The John S. Cook Bank. Even before the fight on labor day, news reporters from all around the country came to report on the daily activities. The 8000 seat arena was more than sold out it was overflowing with fight

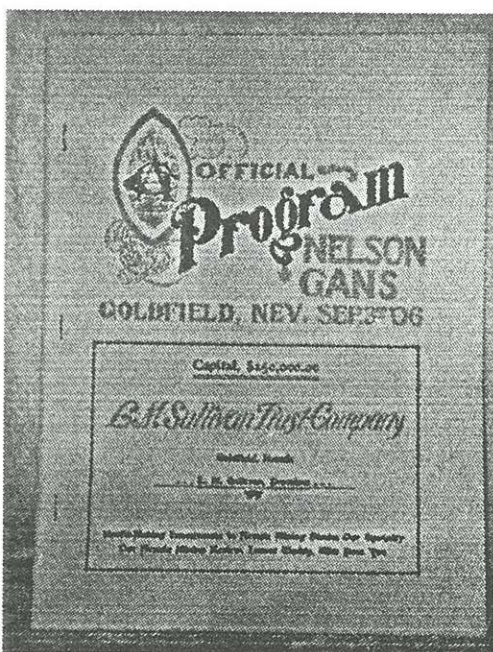


fans and they were not disappointed, the fight lasted 42 rounds. At first the negro Gans out-slugged Nelson, who after 10 rounds began to rough up his opponent with low blows and head butts, then during round 32 Gans broke a bone in his left hand but he kept on fighting. 10 rounds later Nelson sent a vicious low blow to the groin of Gans and the referee declared Gans to be the winner by foul. The publicity of the fight was priceless to the mine promoters and the Goldfield boom carried on right into 1907. One newsman declared that Goldfield was producing \$130,000 every day, and there was not a vacant store or house in the town.

By mid 1907 friction between the mine owners and the the unions continued to hamper free development of the mines and in April of that year the Western Federation of Miners was the major recognized union, this averted a major workers strike for a short while. Late in November 1907 operations slowed when 1,900 miners struck, they had disagreements over wages, script for payments, and the installation of changing rooms in the mines so that the high-grading practices might be eliminated. These times slowed the boom of Goldfield along with the nationwide financial panic of 1907. Outside capital was cut off, and 2 of the 3 banks closed their doors. With this and the miner's striking, Goldfield became an armed camp. Governor Sparks sent in armed troops to restore order and the rest of 1908 made for a slow recovery from the depression. The mines continued to do well until a peak of production was attained in 1910, of over \$11 million in bullion. Latter in September of 1913 heavy rains came and the resulting flashflood swept through Goldfield carrying with it several houses. Ten years later a fire started in the business district and it wiped out 53 square blocks of the city.



*Carpenters union ribbon.  
Goldfield, Nevada.*



The last serious mining effort was in 1919 the final year of the Consolidated Mining Co. Since then low metal prices have discouraged large mine reopening. The town declined to less than a thousand by 1930, and more floods and other weather related problems soon followed. The Goldfield hotel has not seen a paying customer since 1946. Today there are about 195 permanent residents of Goldfield. The Giant headframes around the base of Columbia mountain mark the site of greatest gold rush Nevada ever saw. I have always really enjoyed visiting Goldfield and the Tonopah mining towns and districts. The history of the area is evident in the historical structures, and ruins that lie in the arid desert scenery. I was prompted to write this short article about Goldfield after reading with interest of the great historical find mentioned in the last issue of the Collectors Mining Review. Even after all these years Goldfield is yielding treasures.