

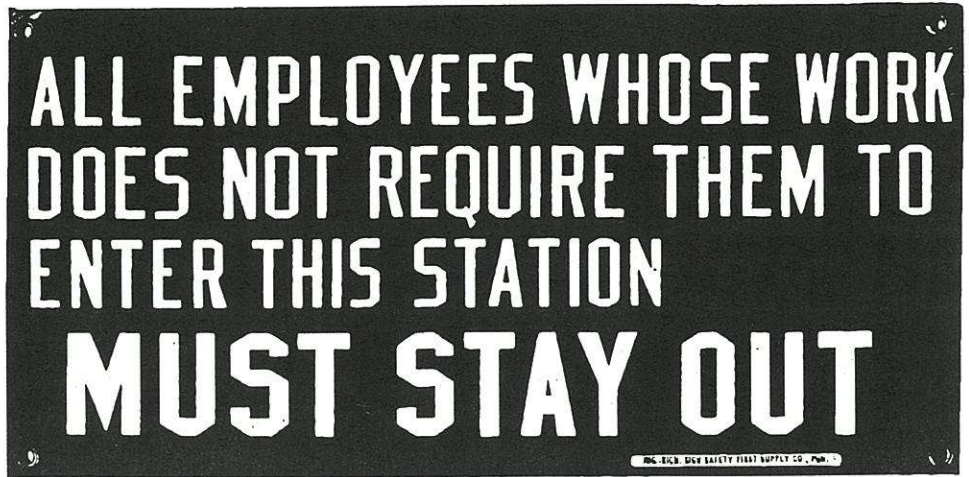
The Hoist House: a Lonely Place

Dave Thorpe

"Intrusion! Intrusion!" the electronic alarm sounded, as my friend Todd Town entered the new hoist house at the Old Dominion Mine. This building had replaced the old one which closed down in 1930. The hoist house was strictly an "off-limits" place Todd explained. Many accidents have been recorded in history where a distracted hoist operator moved the cage at the wrong time or failed to stop it at the proper place. Such a mistake was often fatal with those in the cage being either cut in two at the stations or crushed as the cage wound into the massive spindle in the hoist house.

Before the advent of electronic alarms, the hoist house was adorned with bold-lettered signs telling all to keep out unless they had specific business to attend to. The sign shown above is from the "old" pre-1930 hoist house (Old Dominion Mine, Globe, Arizona). It reflects the seriousness with which the mine intended the hoist operator to be left undisturbed. The porcelain sign measures 7 by 13 inches, and is blue with white lettering. The manufacturer's name in the lower right corner reads: Ing.-Rich. Safety First Sign Co., Pgh., PA.

At the turn of the century, the hoist operator was paid more than other miners: \$4 a day compared to the usual three. But, prestigious as this may have seemed, the job was not all roses. The hoistman's day was by necessity devoid of social contact,

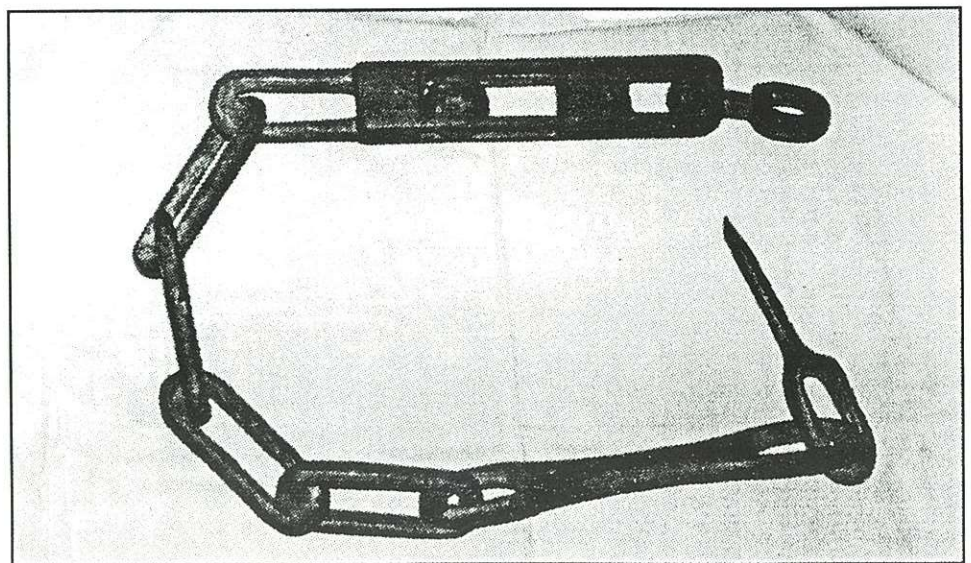


Sign from the Hoist House at the Old Dominion Mine.

and severe boredom was the inevitable consequence.

Recently, Bruce Beck introduced me to an artifact which I had never seen before. Shown in the photo below is a "hoistman's chain." By amazing coincidence, this too was from the Old Dominion Mine. To pass the

time, the hoist operator would whittle down a wooden tamping rod into various forms, often a chain. The wood chain shown here has a little ball within a square cage carved into the end. The loop at the end swivels too! When I asked Bruce what its purpose was, he answered quite matter-of-factly: "No purpose."



A Hoistman's chain. Carved from one piece of wood. (Bruce Beck collection)