

Some Black Hills Ghost Towns and Their Origins

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A ghost town is any village, stage station, post office, mining camp, railroad siding, or wide spot in the road that consisted of more than one family and was a named community with an existence of its own, distinct, and in addition to that of the family or principal business that it contained. A ghost town is a town that once flourished but is now defunct, abandoned, quiescent, or so radically altered that it has lost completely the original goals with which it started. These are towns that the passing years have long since divested of the ambitions, purposes, and populations which originally gave them their community existence. Nevertheless, among the ruins and the memories that still inhabit them, their spirits—call them ghosts if you will—can sometimes still be seen and oftentimes still be savored. Even in as vociferous a mining area as the Black Hills such towns arose from a variety of causes and declined or changed their names, their aims, and their inhabitants for many reasons.

Rockerville, for example, was once Captain Jack's Dry Diggings, a busy little placer mining town with an enormous flume that came from Sheridan and brought water to wash the sticky clays of the Rockerville bars.¹ Now, it is merely a rebuilt tourist attraction. All that remains of the old town is

1. The locations of the towns mentioned will be generally given by quarter-section, section, township, and range. Rockerville, which is quite spread out, lies in Secs. 13 and 14, T1S, R6E.

90 *South Dakota History*

the chimney of Cortland Rush's cabin, and tourists have pretty well made away with even that. Sheridan, once the county seat of Pennington County, now lies beneath the rippling waters of Sheridan Lake.² Pactola was once a mining town that was named for the Lydian river of golden sands, Pactolus.³ It, too, sank beneath the waters of the lake that bears its name. Deerfield, originally known as Mountain City, is under Deerfield Lake although a hamlet by the same name still serves as a post office and store for nearby ranchers.⁴ Otis is another town that has changed completely—it was once a logging camp with a busy saw mill. Now, the State Game Lodge rests on the foundations of the old mill and the character of the community has materially altered.⁵ Sometimes, as at Lauzon, the community was once a bustling one, but all that is left now is the school.⁶

The earliest communities associated with the Hills are the old fur trading posts, which, if not exactly in the Hills, are so tied up with the history of them that they must be included. The Sarpy Post, located where the Rapid Creek enters the Cheyenne River, was such a place: it blew up in 1832 producing a rain of bear traps that continued for a week, and of course killing Mr. Sarpy. The post was then abandoned. The courses of the Rapid Creek and of the Cheyenne River have both changed and no one knows for sure just where the Sarpy Post was.⁷ Another fur post was near Cache Butte, southeast of the Hills. To the north Saint Onge is said to have beams in cellars and basements that bear dates from the early 1830s,

2. Sheridan was in the SW¼, Sec. 12, T1S, R5E.

3. Pactola was in the NW¼, Sec. 2, T1N, R5E. For years it was famous as the home of Musekamp Lodge.

4. The old Deerfield, now under Deerfield Lake, was in the NE¼, Sec. 26, T1N, R2E.

5. Otis, which also seems to have been known as Camp Galena in the early days of the State Park, was in the NE¼, Sec. 27, T3S, R6E.

6. Lauzon had a store and a post office at its peak; it was in the SE¼, Sec. 3, T5S, R1E.

7. The Sarpy Post may have been located about one-half mile east of Creston.

scratched into the wood by the Frenchmen who built the buildings.⁸

Military posts, though transient, have left their names on the land. Camp Warren, Lieutenant Gouverneur K. Warren's base near what is now Newcastle, Wyoming, was a trading post for many years, and only in 1875 when it was taken over by the Jenney expedition did it get its present name, Camp Jenney. Camp Success in Custer State Park, a few miles southeast of the Gordon Stockade, was the post from which Captain John Mix successfully searched for and evicted the Gordon Party in the winter of 1875.⁹ The Gordon Stockade became an army post,¹⁰ but it should not be confused with the Union Stockade, which was in the heart of Custer City. Camp Collier was a genuine fighting fort at the mouth of Red Canyon, a few miles north of Edgemont. Traces of the walls and corner bastions can still be seen on the ground near the Jim Bell Ranch.¹¹ Camp Crook—and there were several places called Camp Crook—was founded when General George Crook came into the Hills in 1875 to expel the miners prospecting in violation of the Laramie Treaty with the Sioux. It was about where Pactola Lake is.¹² Fort Meade had as its predecessors Camp Sturgis and Camp Ruhlen and opposite, on the other side of the Hills, Camp Bradley housed soldiers beneath the shadow of Inyan Kara Mountain.¹³ The soldiers did not leave many

8. Saint Onge is on the line between Secs. 23 and 26, T7N, R3E.

9. Captain Mix's map locates Camp Success on French Creek eight or nine miles southeast of the stockade. The camp was also occupied by the Reverend Samuel Hinman's party during the preceding summer.

10. The Gordon Stockade of the Gordon-Russell-Collins party was in the SW¼, Sec. 21, T3S, R5E. The present reconstruction is the third—the stockade was built in 1874, rebuilt in the 1920s, and rebuilt again by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

11. Camp Collier, later known as Red Canyon Station, was in Sec. 20, T8S, R3E, south of the Buena Vista grindstone quarries.

12. See footnote 3. There is also a Camp Crook in the northwest corner of the state and one near Crook City.

13. Camp Bradley was on Inyan Kara Creek; it is conceivable that it was near the present hamlet of Inyan Kara. Maps of the period show it slightly north of due east of the mountain.



General George A. Custer's initials

G. C.

U. S. 7

traces, but if you know how to look, you can find the places where they lived while they alternately fought the miners and the Indians. If you look hard enough, you can find some traces, like General Custer's initials "GAC, US 7th," in the rock to show you that mighty men were there.¹⁴

In 1875 the placer miners came to the Black Hills. Briefly expelled by the energetic General Crook during the summer of that year, they surged back in the fall and came in strength in 1876 to lay out, sometimes with laborious formality,

14. The initials carved on top of Inyan Kara have disappeared (see correspondence from C.J. McDonald, M.D., *Bits and Pieces: Your Own Western History Magazine* 7, no. 1[1971]:17-18). Other Custer initials, however, can still be found in the Hills.

sometimes with no formality at all, the early placer mining towns. Hayward, now merely the home of Rushmore Cave, was once a county seat that was served by a lengthy flume from far up Battle Creek that brought water to the placer workings high above the valley floor. Traces of the flume can still be seen and placer work still goes forward to this day.¹⁵ At Castleton, near Mystic, the miners tried to work the deep, slatey placers of Castle Creek, but the gold lay too deep and the works were soon abandoned. Revived in the 1890s as a railroad town, Castleton thrived briefly, housing the railroad crews that pushed the railroad north toward Deadwood. Then, it died, again, as the crews passed on. A third boom in the 1900s brought a dredge into the valley and left behind the huge piles of waste that still mark the site of its activities. The ribs of the barge that held the dredge can still be seen, sinking into Castle Creek by the side of the road.¹⁶

The Concord stagecoaches and their slower companions, the ox-drawn freight wagons, brought adventurers as well as supplies into the Hills. Gamblers, fancy women, mining engineers, speculators, and greenhorns rode in perilous style over the rutted trails while miners and prospectors plodded behind the bull teams toward the new bonanzas. At first the stages made their way up the center of the Hills from Red Canyon, protected by the vigilant troopers at Camp Collier, but Indian hostilities soon made this route too dangerous and in 1878 it was abandoned. You can still follow its ruts, however, and where time has healed those scars, you can follow the trail by the quarter-mile posts that were set up to guide the drivers through the winter snows. Spring-on-the-Hill, a famous stop on the side of Red Canyon, was a welcome place of refreshment after the long pull up the valley—an oasis in the dry and barren southern Hills.¹⁷ The Twelve-Mile

15. Hayward is in the SW¼, Sec. 18, T2S, R6E.

16. Castleton, which is easily recognized by the piles of dredge waste, was in the NE¼, Sec. 8, T1N, R4E.

17. Spring-on-the-Hill is roughly in the N¼, Sec. 35, T6S, R3E, perhaps one-half mile east of the present road. The spring lies north of the ruins of the dwellings and corrals.

Station, later known as the Humphreus Ranch, was not only a famous stage stop but later a well-known summer resort.¹⁸ Gillette Stage Station¹⁹ north of Custer and Bull Dog Ranch²⁰ north of Rochford also provided rest, protection, and sometimes raucous entertainment for the passing travelers headed for the diggings of the northern Hills.

The railroads, both standard and narrow gauge, soon followed the miners into the Black Hills and little towns and communities grew up beside each whistle stop. Tunnel, north of Deadwood, was just such a community. It still has a few houses and one of the most durable privies in existence.²¹ The incredible clutter of rail lines around Deadwood are a delight to the railroad buff—one line ran up to Trojan²² and over the side of Spearfish Canyon and then up the canyon to Spearfish itself. Another line from Trojan went to Preston²³ and pushed on, nearly to the cliffs overlooking the Latchstring Inn, to serve a growing mining camp at Cyanide.²⁴

Logging operations, too, had their railroads that shifted and altered the land as they gnawed their way through the Black Hills timber, their puffing Shay and Heisler engines straining upward over 12 percent grades. The Warren-Lamb operations ran from Rapid City clear to Sheridan and from Fairburn up to what is now Center Lake in Custer State Park.

18. Humphreus Ranch is in the NE¼, Sec. 3, T5E, R3E.

19. Gillette Stage Station still stands in the SW¼, Sec. 23, T1S, R3E.

20. Bull Dog Ranch (the name is variously attributed to either the owner Mrs. Bulldog, to the presence of a bulldog on the ranch, or to the nearby Bulldog placer mining claim) is in the NW¼, Sec. 21, T3N, R3E.

21. Tunnel lies at the north end of the tunnel in the SE¼, Sec. 1, T5N, R3E. South of the tunnel was a famous commercial cave, now abandoned.

22. Trojan, home of the Bald Mountain Mining Company, was in the S¼, Sec. 35, T5N, R2E.

23. Preston, still well-preserved, is in the SW¼, Sec. 28, T5N, R2E; it was one of a complex of towns around Ragged Top: Balmoral, Dacy, Cyanide, and Victoria.

24. Cyanide was in the SW¼, Sec. 28, T5N, R2E.

They even hoisted their trains up a 28 percent grade and lowered them down the other side on a 34 percent decline to cross a particularly perilous divide.²⁵ The Homestake logging rails ran south as far as Merritt²⁶ where a fish farm is now, and the McLaughlin lumber interests ran a line from Nahant²⁷ clear into Wyoming and perhaps as far as the Homestake's now deserted logging city of Moskee.²⁸ Anywhere you walk in the northern Hills, you can find abandoned railroad grades, and as you walk along them, you may stumble in the depressions left when the crossties rotted away and trip now and then over a spike that once held down the rails. If you listen carefully, you may even hear the high-pitched, squawking whistle of a Shay or Heisler coming up behind you!

There were cattle towns too, until trucking replaced the railroads as the economical way to ship stock off to market. Dumont²⁹ in the northern Hills now has only its cattle pens and the ruins of a section house. Clifton, on the Burlington, has ghosts that whisper from deserted ranches and abandoned cabins.³⁰ Even the church at Dewey³¹ is falling into disrepair and one day Buffalo Gap³² may be a memory.

Quarries needed to supply a burgeoning Black Hills boom

25. The hoist was east of the Coolidge Inn in the State Park and took the logging trains up from the valley of the Grace Coolidge Creek (then known as Squaw Creek) through Hump Gulch and into the Beaver Creek Valley.

26. Merritt was in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 7, T2N, R5E. The railroad grade can still be seen from the highway.

27. Many ruins can still be found at Nahant in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 34, T3N, R3E. Nearby were Gregory and Elkhorn.

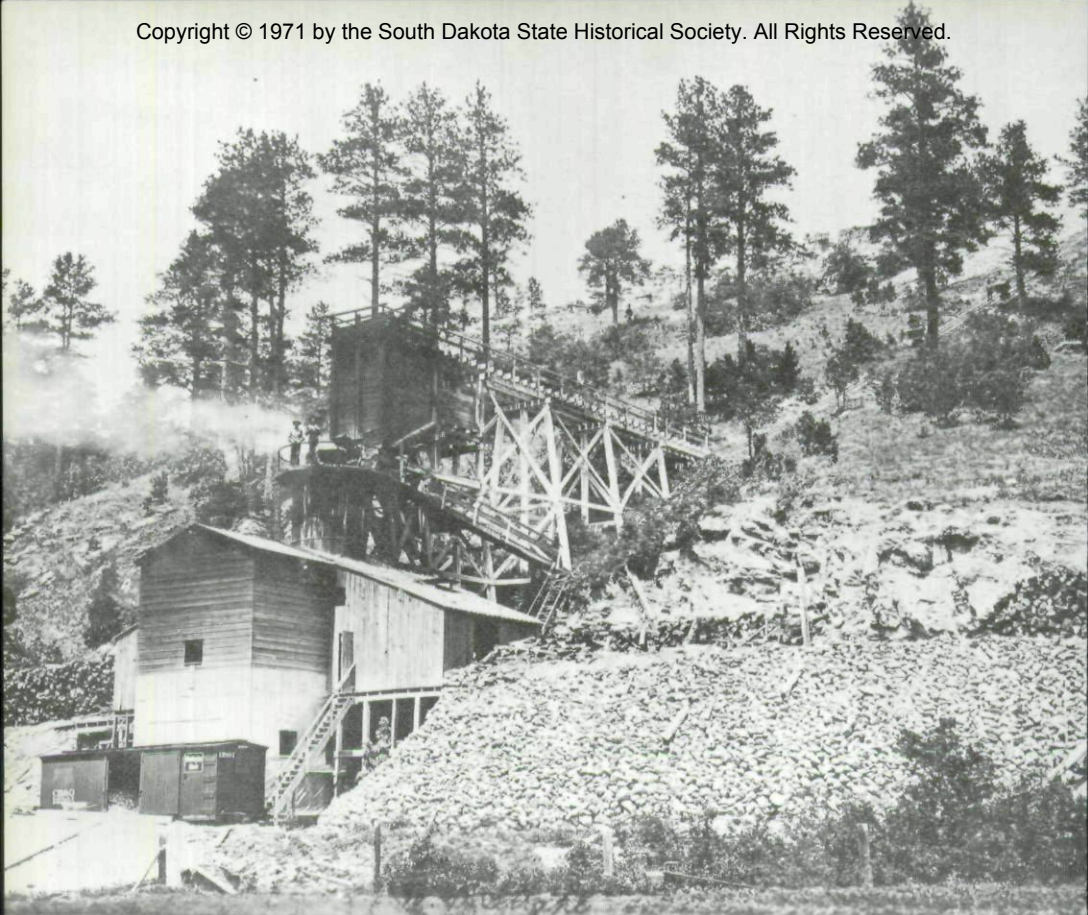
28. Moskee, supposedly named in Pidgin-English meaning "Ok, who gives a d—," is in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 33, T50N, R61W, just over the border in Wyoming.

29. Dumont was in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 7, T3N, R3E.

30. Clifton was in the NW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 8, T42N, R60W.

31. Dewey is in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 18, T6S, R1E.

32. Buffalo Gap, a famous old cattle town, is in Secs. 29 and 30, T6S, R7E.



A lime kiln and a skip hoist at Calcite, 1905



*The mine manager's
home in Cambria*

founded still more towns. Calcite³³ and Loring³⁴ provided lime to sweeten the water for the Homestake's boilers, and if you poke around the old kilns, you will get some idea of the origin of the expression "as dry as a lime-burner's hat." Evans³⁵ near Hot Springs supplied high grade sandstone for many public buildings in and around the Hills. Buena Vista, north of Edgemont, provided grindstones. Some are still there—too big for even vandals to damage or remove.³⁶

Coal founded the greatest ghost town in the Hills, Cambria. It was located on a spur of the Burlington north of Newcastle. Here high grade anthracite was mined for over forty years to feed the delicate appetites of mountain-climbing locomotives. Coke, too, was cooked in rows of beehive ovens, and it was a bargain for Cambria coke contained three or four dollars worth of gold in every ton. Cambria is still there, now nearly crumbled into the ground, but the manager's home on the side of the valley still keeps an eye on the remains.³⁷

Resorts to entertain the busy Black Hillers and attract tourists from the East created many towns which are now forgotten. Cascade, southwest of Hot Springs, was built in the happy expectation that its warm springs and strategic location on the best possible railroad route into the Hills would transform it into a prosperous spa. But the railroad went elsewhere, and the town collapsed leaving behind the ornate stone bank, the bowling alley, and the banker's home, which

33. Calcite, with its ruins of lime kilns, is in the SW¼, Sec. 30, T4N, R6E and was originally served by a railroad that went northwest to Lead and the Homestake Mine.

34. Loring, with lime still being produced in its vicinity, lies in the SE¼, Sec. 33, T5S, R4E.

35. Evans, also known as Evans Quarry or Evans Siding, was in the NE¼, Sec. 33, T7S, R6E.

36. Buena Vista was in the SW¼, Sec. 17, T8S, R3E.

37. Cambria, about which *Bits and Pieces: Your Own Western History Magazine* (Newcastle, Wyoming) has published much useful information, lies in Sec. 29, T46N, R61W. On the high land to the northwest of the town was the residential area, Antelope City.

98 *South Dakota History*



The W. Allen Bank, the Fargo grocery store, and the Cascade Club at Cascade

Black Hills Ghost Towns 99



Banker Allen's home at Cascade

was built long ago in late Victorian Gothic style.³⁸ The Black Hills Country Club, founded in 1925 by a group of Chicago dudes, flourished briefly near Hill City until the Great Depression when it became Palmer Gulch Lodge, a summer resort and summer cabin area.³⁹

No matter how many communities sprang up from peripheral causes, the fact remains that it was the hard rock mining industry that produced most of the ghost towns in the Hills. The gaping shafts, the piles of mine waste, and the

38. Cascade is in the W½, Sec. 20, T8S, R5E. The springs are upstream from the town and the falls are about two miles below.

39. My father was one of the dudes and Palmer Gulch was my home for many years. The Black Hills Country Club centered in the NW¼, Sec. 4, T2S, R5E but owned about three miles of Palmer Gulch.

100 *South Dakota History*

badlands of eroded tailings at Hornblend,⁴⁰ Blue Lead,⁴¹ Bald Mountain,⁴² Flatiron,⁴³ and Galena⁴⁴ mark the site of many hopes and failures. Shaft houses, ore bins, and foundations at Maitland,⁴⁵ Two Bit,⁴⁶ Golden West,⁴⁷ and Myersville⁴⁸ are still there, at first too valuable to be dismantled and now too decrepit to be worth the trouble. Enormous vats from the cyanide process, scoured bright by the corrosive chemicals, can still be seen across the valley from Trojan, and at Astoria⁴⁹ the mill and hoist of the Golden Reward Mine is noticed by every tourist on his way from Lead to Spearfish Canyon. The Lookout Mine's mill⁵⁰ on Castle Creek is still the awesome structure to which ore was brought on an elevated tramway from far up the side of Lookout Mountain.

Whole gold mining communities await the ghost town hunter in the Hills. Trojan was abandoned in 1959 when the

40. Hornblend, now a summer home, was in the NW¼, Sec. 3, T1N, R3E.

41. Blue Lead and its companion mining operation, the Calumet with its old smelter, lay east of Sheridan Lake on Blue Lead Mountain.

42. Bald Mountain, the home of the mine by that name, was near or actually a part of Trojan (see footnote 22).

43. Flatiron, its site marked by incredible tailings, was earlier known as Yellow Creek; it lies south of Kirk in the E½, Sec. 9, T4N, R3E.

44. Galena, which is still a thriving community, is in the NE¼, Sec. 9, T4N, R4E.

45. Maitland, earlier known as Garden City and not to be confused with the Maitland in Fall River County, is in the SE¼, Sec. 18, T5N, R3E.

46. Two Bit, an area that abounds in ruins that includes a massive two-story stone house or store, is in the SE¼, Sec. 25, T5N, R3E.

47. The Golden West Mine was at Hornblend.

48. Myersville, the center of a large number of small mines and still a sparsely inhabited community, lies in the SE¼, Sec. 27, T2N, R3E. It is sometimes referred to as Myers City or Altamine for the Alta Mine nearby.

49. Astoria is in the SE¼, Sec. 6, T4N, R3E.

50. The Lookout Mine's mill and the community known as Lookout were in the SW¼, Sec. 1, T1N, R3E.

Bald Mountain Mine ceased operations. Roubaix⁵¹ in its quiet valley was the home of the Clover Leaf Mine, but only a few homes and the bull wheels from the stamp mills still remain. Rochford⁵² in Irish Gulch was the home of the old Standby Mine and the ruins of the mill brood in silence over the community. Little Myersville near Rochford is surrounded by silent mines and houses. The Mineral Hill Mine⁵³ near Welcome⁵⁴ on the Wyoming border still operates occasionally, but the old New Reliance House⁵⁵ on Annie Creek no longer takes in boarders.

Sometimes all that you will find is some scrap of the past that only the enlightened eye can understand. Odd wood troughs at Minneapolis⁵⁶ may have been part of the Diamond City mines. A broken hoist at Cyanide hints that once a railroad and a hundred homes provided for the miners there, beneath the shadow of Ragged Top Mountain. Sometimes all that is left is a gasp of imagination as one views the Victoria Mine⁵⁷ at the top of Spearfish Canyon and sees in the mind's eye the dizzying aerial tramway that carried ore and miners to the mill at the bottom of the valley.

Silver, as well as gold, has produced its ruins. Galena is still an occupied town, and although the Homestake is even now reopening some of the silver mines that have been closed

51. Roubaix is in the SW¼, Sec. 29, T4N, R4E.

52. Rochford is in the NE¼, Sec. 23, T2N, R3E.

53. Mineral Hill with its abandoned offices, shops, and miners' cabins is in Wyoming at the junction of Secs. 28, 29, 32, and 33, T51N, R60W on the east side of Spotted Tail Creek. The mine still operates occasionally, but the owners discourage visitors.

54. Welcome is in the SW¼, Sec. 28, T51N, R60W.

55. The New Reliance Mine on Annie Creek was in the NE¼, Sec. 3, T4N, R2E. Old maps show that it was reached by a railroad from Trojan, but I have never been able to trace such a line on the ground.

56. Minneapolis is just north of Diamond City in the SE¼, Sec. 1, T2N, R3E.

57. Victoria, on the edge of Spearfish Canyon, was in the center of Sec. 17, T5N, R2E; the lower part of the town is about three miles north of Savoy on an abandoned railroad spur.



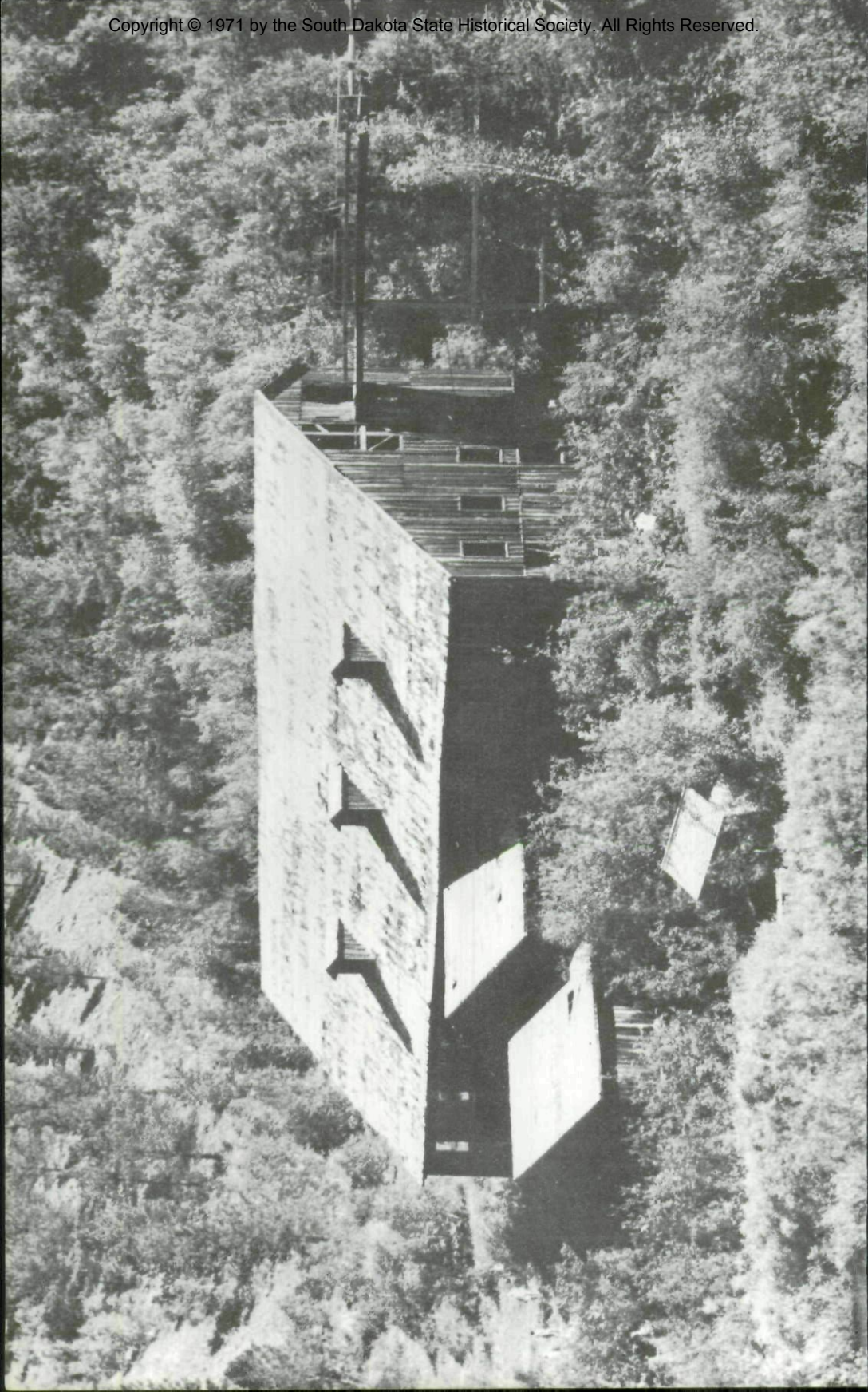
The Branch Mint Mine layout near Galena today

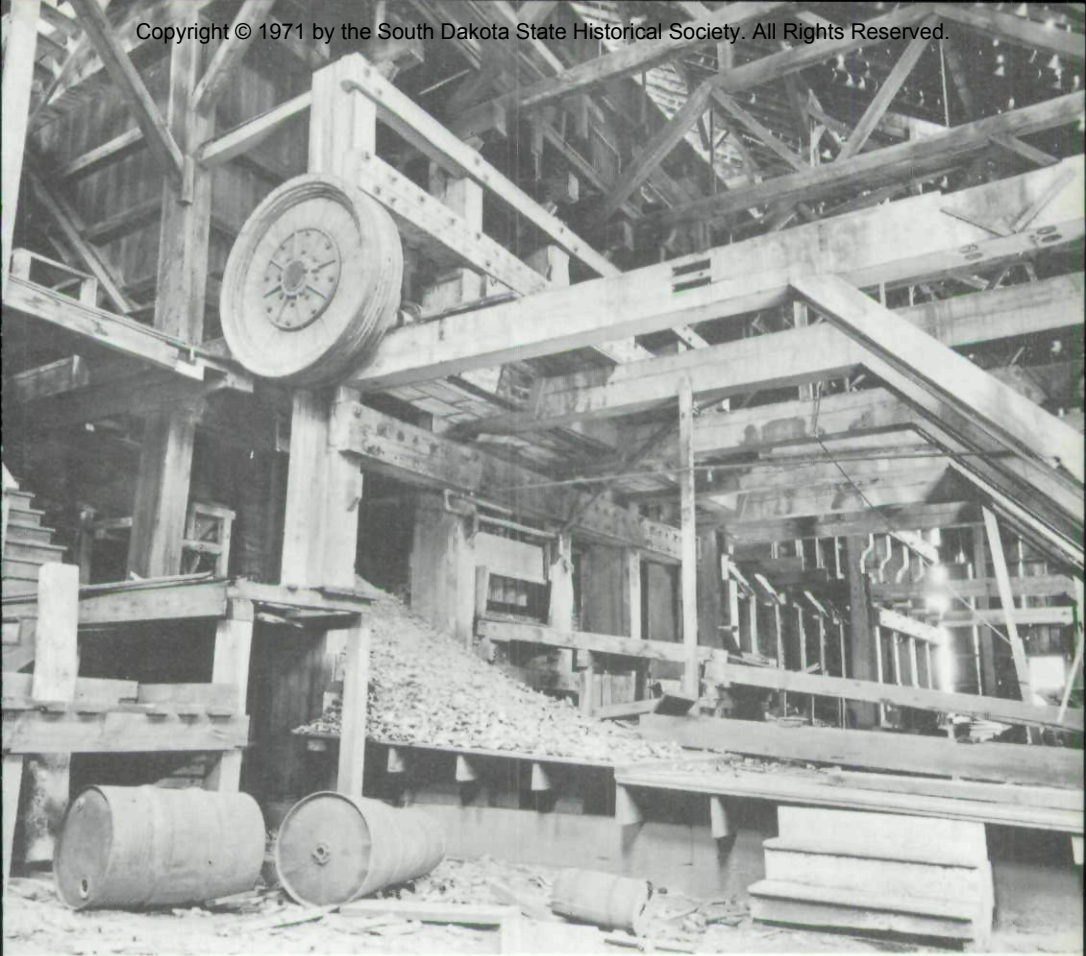
The shaft house at the Maitland Mine





The remains of the mill and the hoist of the Golden Reward Mine at Astoria





*The Standby Mine's
mill and its interior
located near Rochford*



The ghost town of Trojan today



The Rochford main street about 1935

Miners' cabins at Mineral Hill





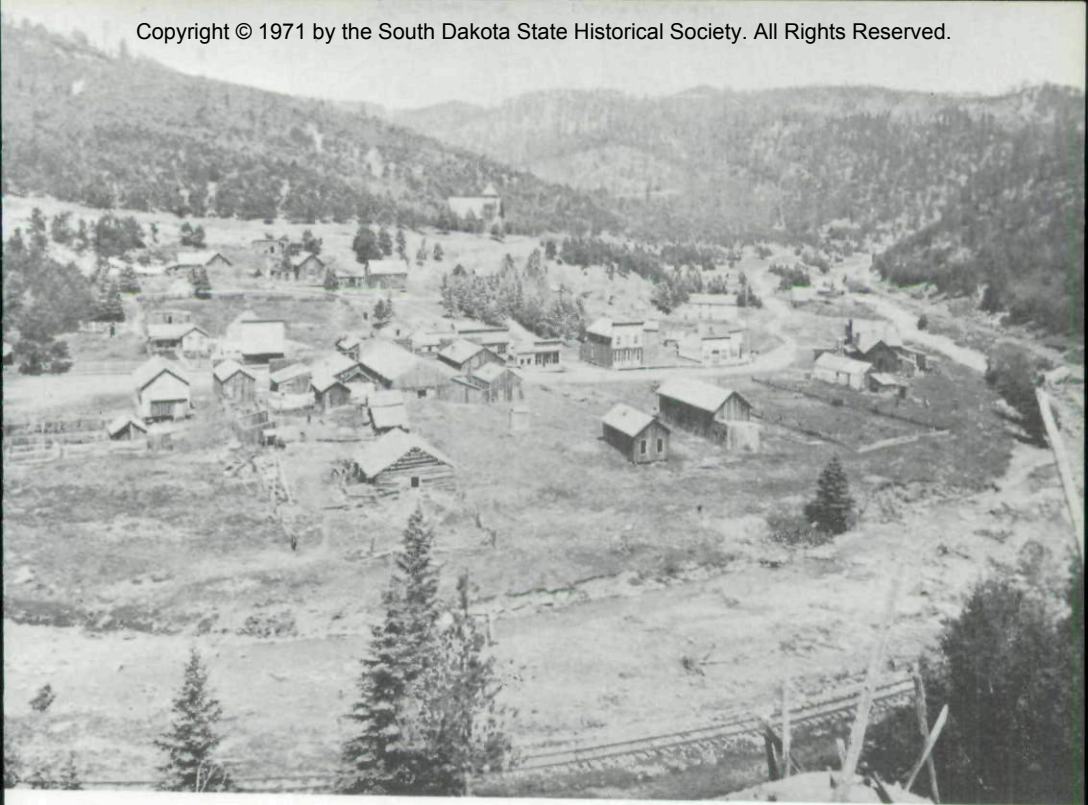
The Cleopatra Mine near Carbonate

for seventy years, the town still has many ruins to recall its much more lively past. Carbonate⁵⁸ is deserted, and the nearby Cleopatra Mine is crumbling into ruins along Squaw Creek, its heavy machinery trapped at the bottom of the valley. Spokane, southwest of Keystone, has a school, a mill, and offices all guarded by an affable and watchful caretaker.⁵⁹ For years the waiting mine stood ready to spring into renewed activity at the throw of a switch, eager to resume production of silver, lead, zinc, and arsenic.

Tin, also, has been a long-continued will-o'-the-wisp of Black Hills mining. In the 1880s the Harney Peak Tin Mining,

58. Carbonate, earlier known as West Virginia and Carbonate Camp, seems to have been composed of at least three communities centering, roughly, in the SW¼, Sec. 10, T5N, R2E.

59. Spokane is in the SW¼, Sec. 27, T2S, R6E.



Galena, showing the Deadwood Central Railroad, 1909-1910

*Looking downstream at
what is left of Galena today*





Carbonate Camp in the early 1890s

Black Hills Ghost Towns 111



Houses in Glendale

Milling, and Manufacturing Company, an English concern, owned over a thousand claims between Keystone and Hill City. Their tin mill near Hill City was for years a noted landmark but has long since been dismantled.⁶⁰ Their mine, the Addie, and the nearby Good Luck Tungsten Mine gave rise to Addie Camp⁶¹ and the community around it, but neither mine produced very much. Tinton⁶² on Negro Hill has been the site of tin activity for nearly a century and the

60. The tin mill often served as a playhouse for my sister and me when we were little. Nothing now remains of it but the foundations in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 29, T1S, R5E. William Turrentine Jackson in "Dakota Tin: British Investors at Harney Peak," *North Dakota History* 33, no. 1 (Winter 1966):22-63 describes the machinations of the Harney Peak Company.

61. Addie Camp is in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 33, T1S, R5E.

62. Tinton is in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$, Sec. 19, T5N, R1E. Although commonly referred to as "Nigger" Hill, that mountain was punctiliously entitled "Negro" Hill in the public press of gold rush days.



*Deserted miners' cabins
and an office building in Tinton*



deserted town has a miner's hall, a store, and miners' houses—but not much tin down in the mine. Glendale near Keystone has a multitude of houses awaiting the reopening of the Otho Mine.⁶³

How are these towns traced? How are the clues gathered that lead to their discovery and location? The ghost town hunter knows the answer—through a patient search that has all the fun of a crossword puzzle in the library and of a mountain climb in the field. First, look up the sources, and then, try to get to the spot. Many of these now-vanished towns are shown, often inaccurately, on early maps of the Black Hills. The great mapping of the Hills around the turn of the century, which was carried forward by the United States Geological Survey, recorded still more towns. The revisions of these maps and the others based on them continue to reveal new towns and new names for old ones. Old newspaper items often mention the founding of a new community—or at least a new bar and grill—at some identifiable place and sometimes this small enterprise grew into a real community, flourished, and then decayed back into the rocks and weeds from which it sprung. Names, too, changed. Gregory, north of Rochford, seems to have been known successively as Elk Creek, Elkhorn City, Carterville, Montana City, and Grandview. This is, however, only supposition: each one of these may have been a real community in its own right, adjacent to, but not superimposed upon the original town of Gregory.⁶⁴ Old books and old documents mention various localities that travelers and visitors passed through and it is left to the historian to figure out just where they were. It is a search based on frail clues. But, when you find the area, and some local inhabitant full of years and lies confides in you that this indeed was the town that you were looking for—tho' it hasn't

63. Glendale, centering in the SE¼, Sec. 15, T2S, R6E, runs up and down Grayhound Gulch for two or three miles.

64. Gregory was in Sec. 3, T2N, R3E, east of the Burlington railroad. The acute reader will have noticed that most of the towns mentioned lie along Range 3 East; this range fortuitously coincides with the so-called mineral belt in the Black Hills, the mother lode of the area.

114 *South Dakota History*

been known by *that* name for many years—you know that the clues were not completely false.

There are well over six hundred such ghost towns in the Hills. They are little communities, sometimes with a few ruined houses, sometimes with little more than a trace of the foundations and a few ash heaps, or maybe only the recollections of old timers to identify them. Each one, however, is a place where the spirit of the past is strong and where the deeds and the voices of those who once lived in the area still murmur in the wind-blown grasses. It is this sense of achieving a communion, a continuity with the past, of standing on the very spot where others long since have gone once stood that lures the ghost town hunter toward new discoveries. He stands amidst the ruins and says, with a touch of awe and of sadness, what the unknown writer of the Book of Lamentations said when he gazed on the ruins of Israel so long ago: "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!"

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