

## DAKOTA IMAGES

During his thirty-year tenure as superintendent of the Homestake Mining Company, Thomas Johnston Grier supervised innovations that cost millions of dollars but reaped large profits, making the company one of North America's largest producers of gold.

Grier was born in Pakenham, Ontario, Canada, in 1850 and graduated from high school in Iroquois, Ontario. He then worked for his father, the Iroquois postmaster, and learned telegraphy. In 1878, Grier began his career with the Homestake as a bookkeeper and telegrapher. Following the death of the company's first superintendent in 1884, Homestake's owner, multimillionaire George Hearst of San Francisco, chose Grier to run the company. In addition to mining operations, Grier was responsible for the affiliated enterprises of a large mercantile store and hotel, the Black Hills and Fort Pierre Railroad, and the First National Bank of Lead.

A hard-working Scotsman, Grier labored from 1893 to 1901 to consolidate all of the Homestake claims, creating the largest mining property in the Black Hills. He also oversaw many improvements to the company's mining processes, among them metallurgist Charles W. Merrill's experimental cyanide treatment plant, built in 1899. Grier added stamps to the Homestake mills, modernized the hoisting apparatus, improved air-compression plants for the drills, and converted steam engines and boilers to electricity.

Grier's leadership skills were tested when a major fire broke out in the El-lison mine shaft in 1907. He eventually ordered the mine flooded to extinguish the blaze, and no human lives were lost. Another challenge came in 1909, when tensions between union and nonunion workers resulted in a lockout and mine closure. The company began operating again in March 1910 with nonunion men, but the labor discord led to Grier's decision to offer free hospital coverage to miners and their dependents; additional pay for work on Sundays; and the institution of a first-aid and mine-rescue program.

Another gift of the Homestake Mining Company to the town of Lead was a new recreation building, which opened in August 1914. Grier died just three weeks later at a Los Angeles hospital, where he had gone for medical tests. Following his death on 22 September 1914, the people of Lead erected a statue of Grier dedicated to his memory.

—Janet Daley



Thomas J. Grier

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