



Eureka Miners. Special Collections, UNR Library

PEOPLE

Besides the Irish and Cornish miners, there were German, Italian, Chinese and Jewish settlers arriving in Eureka. In 1880, nearly 60% of the population was foreign born. The Italians, known as *Carbonari* or charcoal manufacturers, had a lucrative business with the many smelters in town. Many of the social clubs and lodges had ethnic affiliations and allowed for the expression of shared experiences in a new world. The Ancient Order of Hiberians (Irish), the Italian Benevolent Society, and the Hebrew Congregation are just a few examples of the clubs that proliferated during Eureka's heyday. Many of the buildings built for these organizations still exist, although some may be hidden behind modern storefronts. Names on headstones in the old cemeteries reveal the variety of ethnicities that once lived here.

Eureka also contained a fairly sizeable Chinese population, most of whom resided in the city block between the Sentinel Building and the Colonade Hotel. This area was known as Eureka's "Chinatown" during the boom years. Eureka's Chinese tended to work in occupations other than mining, such as food service, laundry, medical practice, and general labor.

SUGGESTED READING

Eureka and Its Resources, by Lambert Molinelli. Originally published in 1879, reprinted by the University of Nevada Press (1982).

Eureka Memories, by the Eureka County History Project. Eureka County Commissioners (1993).

Eureka's Yesterdays: A Guide to a Historic Central Nevada Town, by Phillip I. Earl, Steven R. James, and Alvin R. McLane. Nevada Historical Society, Reno (1988).

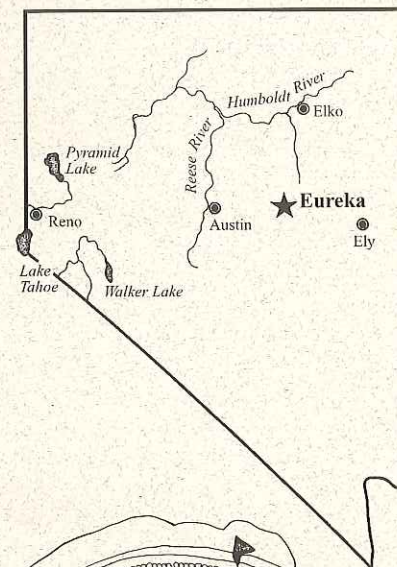
Hard Places: Reading the Landscape of America's Historic Mining Districts, by Richard Francaviglia. University of Iowa Press (1991).

Nevada Ghost Towns & Mining Camps, by Stanley W. Paher. Nevada Publications (1970).

Western Mining, by Otis E. Young, Jr. University of Oklahoma Press (1970).

EUREKA NEVADA

Mines, Mills, Buildings & People

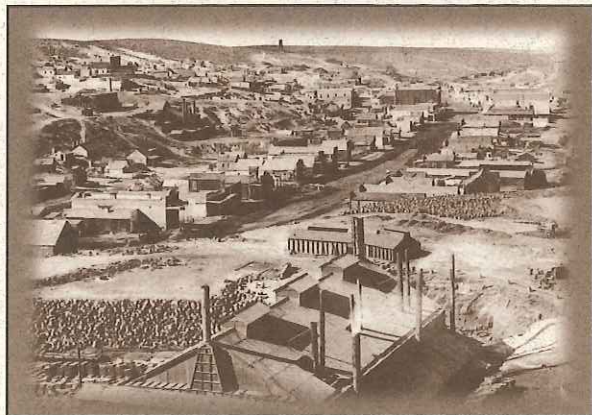


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EUREKA MINING DISTRICT HISTORY

The Eureka Mining District, established in 1864, is the birthplace of the silver-lead smelting industry in the United States. From 1869 to 1879 Eureka was a major producer of domestic pig lead, overshadowed later by such places as Leadville, Colorado. Eureka's ores, however, also contained precious metal. Initially, ore from Eureka was transported to smelters in Salt Lake City, Utah, but Eureka's first smelter, built by Major W.W. McCoy, proved itself quite capable of working the District's silver-lead ores. Larger smelters were quickly constructed at the northern and southern ends of town, the slag heaps of which can still be seen entering and exiting Eureka. By the end of 1871, with the help of San Francisco financial backing, companies such as the Eureka Consolidated and the Richmond Consolidated had formed and were producing silver at an astonishing rate.

The mining boom in Eureka ended almost as quickly as it began. By 1885, most of the then-accessible high-grade ore had been mined. The Eureka and Richmond smelters ceased operation by 1891. Sporadic mining continued, including a brief resurgence before World War I, but the production and prosperity were never again obtained. The era of Eureka's silver boom can be bracketed between 1870 and 1890.



Town of Eureka, Mid-1880s. Special Collections, UNR Library



Fourth of July, 1912. Nevada Historical Society

HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE

Once smelting of Eureka's riches became profitable the rush for settlement was on. Like many mining communities in Nevada, settlement of Eureka was explosive. Two developers laid claim to a stretch of canyon between Diamond and Prospect Mountains, and it is here that Eureka emerged. Tents and crude log cabins gave way to board and brick storefronts. By the mid-1860s there were 250 buildings, many brought intact from other mining camps, and Eureka received a post office, always a symbol of prosperity. The town's population had reached 700 persons.

With five years of continued growth and stability Eureka was claiming to be the second largest urban center in Nevada. By this time Eureka had nearly 9,000 residents, many of them Cornish and Irish immigrants. Between 1876 and 1880 Eureka was visited by four major fires causing millions in damages. The town rebounded after each, however, building thick walled brick buildings with iron fire doors and installing hydrant systems through town. Taking a lighthearted approach, many community members saw the fires as an opportunity to build bigger and fancier structures, including the Eureka County Courthouse, Sentinel Building, and the Opera House. Much of the late 1870s character felt in Eureka today can be attributed to the devastating fires that caused the town to rebuild.

MILLS AND SMELTERS

In 1878 Eureka boasted sixteen furnaces and ore refineries, Eureka Consolidated and Richmond Consolidated being the two largest. The Pancake quarry outside Eureka supplied the sandstone necessary for furnace construction. This same year the smelters consumed 1.2 million bushels of charcoal, or every tree within 35 miles of town. By the end, they consumed every tree within 50 miles.



Richmond-Eureka Co., Ruby Hill 1916. Nevada Historical Society

The Eureka Consolidated patented a lead smelting technique utilized by other refineries in the district. This refinement process was one of the key ingredients toward obtaining a profitable ore.

The mills and smelters around Eureka proved to be a mixed blessing. While the mining district could refine its own ores, lead-based smoke from the smelters' stacks could not escape the canyon's natural enclosure. The companies came up with an innovative idea and built their stacks along the ground to the tops of the hill. Prevailing winds could then carry the smoke away from town. Smelting was always marginally profitable, and when mining production began to wane, the refineries were some of the first businesses to close. The giant slag heaps at either end of town are all that remains of these enormous refinery facilities.