



# *Mining History News*

Quarterly Newsletter of the Mining History Association

A Publication of the Mining History Association

Fall 2021

## *Presidential Pickings – What Should We Save?*

Between a book project I've been working on and our excellent MHA meeting in Elko last June, there's been a question I've been wrestling with a lot: how do we save and interpret mining history? What "stuff" should be saved so future generations of historians and the interested public can learn? These are remarkably difficult questions.

Think about your own route to engagement with mining history. Chances are good that, somewhere along the way, you learned from surviving artifacts. Maybe you saw a ghost town, or some abandoned equipment in the middle of nowhere. Perhaps you saw a mining display in a museum, or in a public park. Or maybe you witnessed a working mine transform into a closed one, and you pondered what would happen next.

Saving mining history takes a variety of forms, such as capturing stories, taking photographs, and preserving documents, but in this column, I want to focus on the "stuff" itself. Material objects from the past have an immediacy that is (or can be) profound. This "thing" witnessed or played a part in the lives of people now gone forever. What can it tell us? Think of some of America's great historical treasures, such as the desk where the Declaration of Independence was written, or Lincoln's top hat from the night he was assassinated, or -- in a more mining history vein -- the very nugget discovered in 1848 that kicked off the California Gold Rush. Being near any of them brings you somehow nearer to history. (All of these treasures are held for the public by the Smithsonian, by the way.) The power of objects to convey history works at less-grandiose scales as well. I feel a profound connection to my late father each time I use his Craftsman socket wrench or Phillip screwdriver. Those objects convey history -- family history, but history nonetheless -- to me.

So then, what objects should be saved to convey mining history to the future? Museum professionals well understand some fundamental truths about telling history with objects. One is that you cannot save everything. No budget is large enough, no storage is vast enough. A second truth is that some objects can tell better stories than others, or, to put it slightly differently, different objects support different stories. The realities of collecting, including size, space, budget, and availability, can determine what objects can be saved -- and thus influence the stories that historians can tell and from which audiences can learn. If John Sutter had immediately melted down the nugget in 1848, we couldn't stand next to it in a museum today and marvel what it must have been like for Marshall to see it glittering in the millrace.

And sometimes objects and collections can actually illustrate more stories than perhaps their collectors originally intended. A great example of this is the collection of mining lamps in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. This lamp collection, in total, is probably the largest in the world, consisting of thousands of lamps. The first of them were bought new in the 1880s, to help illustrate a collection of coal and mineral specimens shown by the museum at an exhibition in 1884 in

New Orleans. Curators soon added to the collection, likely because they realized how well it fit their interests: lamps didn't take up much room in storage, they were generally cheap to procure, and there were enough variations in type that they might be useful to illustrate technological change over time. Through the 20th century, curators continued to add to the lamp collection, including a donation from Mrs. Grant Wheat, the widow of the inventor of electric mining lamps, who was himself a tremendous collector. Today, a researcher looking to trace design variations in mining lamps would have a myriad of important examples, thanks to these efforts of more than a century.

But sometimes these same objects can help tell historical stories that go beyond technical changes in lighting design. Curators have considered using a mule-mounted mine lamp (purchased by the museum in 1884) in a modern exhibit to help discuss how 19th century workers labored alongside animals in industrial firms, and indeed, supporting documents show how the companies valued the lives of their mules more than the lives of their miners. The mule lamp helps bring these stories to life. Another lamp in the collection -- a Baby Wolf safety lamp -- is interesting for its design, but it becomes a far more compelling artifact when paired with its owner's story about using the lamp during a mine rescue in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup>

So that brings me to a question for you to ponder: what stuff should we save for mining history? Anyone who has been to multiple MHA conferences has seen plenty of mining museums. What were the most compelling objects you've seen there? What stories can they tell? What things have you **not** seen in museums? How might those missing objects be represented or collected in the future? What do museums have enough of, perhaps because it doesn't seem to say much? (I've got one of those: drill steel from power drills.) And perhaps we might even make the question personal: what object might you choose to represent **your** life, or your career?

Museum professionals have done amazing work saving and interpreting the artifacts and exhibits we've seen on countless tours, but our field of mining history will be stronger if we play our part, today, in ensuring that important and meaningful objects get saved for future generations to learn from.

Eric Nystrom  
MHA President

### **In Memoriam John C. Stewart**

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of MHA Vice President and President-elect John C. Stewart this past September. A long-time Denver lawyer, John also loved history. John followed his passion for history and obtained a graduate degree in history from the University of Colorado at Denver in 2002. His master's thesis eventually turned into the book *Thomas F. Walsh, Progressive Businessman and Colorado Mining Tycoon*. When not engaged in law or writing John volunteered with the Denver Rotary Club and other groups that promote the understanding of history and historic preservation. He was a friendly, funny, and generous fellow, who will be missed greatly by the MHA.

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<sup>1</sup> See Eric Nystrom, "In the Aftermath of Tragedy: Herschel Wence and the 1925 City Mine Disaster, Sullivan Co., Indiana," *Mining History Journal* 21 (2014): 22-29)

## **MHA Officers and Nominations**

Each year, the Nominating Committee is charged with nominating a Vice President / President-elect and a minimum of two Board Councilors. With John Stewart's passing, the work of the Nominating Committee is, once again, increased as the position of Vice President / President-elect for the remainder of 2021/22 term and, more importantly, elevating to President of the MHA in June of 2022 is currently vacant.

As such, the following positions are open for nomination:

- 1) MHA President beginning June of 2022,
- 2) Vice-President / President-elect beginning June of 2022,
- 3) Three Board Councilor positions beginning June of 2022, and
- 4) One position on the Nominating Committee

For whatever reason, you chose to be a member of the MHA. The MHA needs volunteers like you to bring their own expertise and ideas forward for the good of the organization. The Council meets face-to-face once a year at the annual conference, and via email or zoom the rest of the year, as needed. Please consider putting yourself forward as a candidate.

The current plan is for nominations to be complete and ballot to be distributed to the membership prior to December 31 for election prior to the 2022 Conference in Birmingham. Please contact John Baeten ([johnpbaeten@yahoo.com](mailto:johnpbaeten@yahoo.com)) if you have questions or would like to volunteer. On behalf of everyone in MHA, thank you.

## **Call for Presentations**

32nd Annual Conference  
Mining History Association  
Birmingham, Alabama  
June 23-26, 2022

The Program Committee of the Mining History Association invites proposals for individual presentations or complete sessions (including chair) on any topic or aspect of mining history. Sessions normally include three papers of twenty minutes each. There are no temporal or geographic limits. Presentations that address historical extractive industries in the Southeast United States, including all metallic, non-metallic, and solid-fuel commodities, are particularly welcome.

Proposals should include title of presentation, an abstract (not to exceed 500 words) for each presentation, plus biographical information about each presenter, including mailing/email address. Please send the written proposals via email attachment to Erik Nordberg at [enordber@utm.edu](mailto:enordber@utm.edu) by Friday, January 7, 2022. Submission by email is required.

The Program Committee for MHA's 2022 Birmingham conference consists of:

Erik Nordberg (chair), University of Tennessee at Martin  
Jo Holt, Keweenaw National Historical Park  
Chris Huggard, Northwest Arkansas Community College

## **Conference Travel Grants Available**

The MHA Board has authorized the issuance of two travel grants of \$750 each for either current college students and recent graduates (within the past three years) to attend and present at the Conference. If requesting a travel grant, please note your request for an application when submitting your Presentation Proposal and Biography.

## New Membership Chair Appointed

At our Fall Board Meeting, Fred Barnard submitted his resignation as Membership Chair with an end date to be determined. Fred stepped into the role following our most recent conference to complete the membership directory. With great reluctance, the Board has accepted his resignation at a mutually agreed upon date.

Barbara Clements has agreed to step in as Membership Chair with President Eric making that appointment to be effective as arranged between Fred and Barbara. Thank you to Fred for his service and to Barbara for step into Fred and Rebecca Lange's large shoes.

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### **MINING HISTORY ASSOCIATION Annual Conference – Tentative Agenda Birmingham, Alabama June 23-26, 2022**

Thu, Jun 23

10:00-6:00	Registration	Hilton @ UAB
10:00-12:00	MHA & Editorial Board Meetings	Hilton @ UAB
1:00-4:00	Sloss Furnaces Tours	Sloss Furnaces
4:00-5:30	Iron Pour Demonstration	Sloss Furnaces

NOTE: Thursday is "Sloss Day" for the MHA. Birmingham is hosting the World Games in July 2022, and Sloss will close after our event—therefore, this is your only chance to see this well-preserved smelting complex and museum!

6:30-9:00	Opening Reception	Hilton @ UAB
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Fri, Jun 24

7:00-11:30	Registration	Hilton @ UAB
8:00-8:30	Opening Session	Hilton @ UAB
8:45-11:30	Technical Sessions	Hilton @ UAB
11:30-1:00	Lunch	Hilton @ UAB
1:00-4:50	Technical Sessions	Hilton @ UAB

6:30-9:00      Awards Banquet      Vulcan Park

--Enjoy Vulcan Park's dramatic setting from atop Red Mountain with a panoramic overlook of downtown. We'll have access to the entire facility—museum, Vulcan statue, patio overlook, etc. It's even built right over an old iron mine tunnel. Don't miss the spectacular views!

Sat, Jun 25

8:45-11:30      Technical Sessions      Hilton @ UAB

11:30-1:00      Presidential Luncheon      Hilton @ UAB

2:00-6:00      Tours—

--Red Mountain Park: walking trails among former iron ore mines, west of downtown

--Ruffner Mountain: former iron ore mining area, now a nature preserve with hiking trails, east of downtown

--Company Towns: visit former mining communities in West Birmingham as well as owners' mansions lining the brow of Red Mountain

5:00-until      Dinner on your own—sample some of Birmingham's renowned cuisine at any number of restaurants/venues—Five Points South, Uptown District, etc. (city maps and information about restaurants and other downtown attractions to be provided by the Greater Birmingham Convention & Visitors Bureau)

Sun, Jun 26

9:00-5:00      Excursion: Sylacauga Marble—visit world-class Sculptural marble quarries in Sylacauga, an hour's drive east of Birmingham and visit with European-trained Sculptor-in-Residence Craigger Browne (Box lunch included)

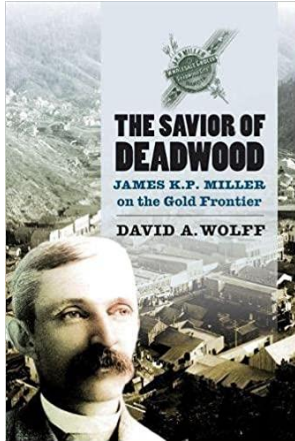
10:00-5:00      Excursion: Tannehill, Blocton, Brierfield—visit two antebellum ironworks (both destroyed by Union Cavalry in the Spring of 1865) and the state-of-the-art Alabama Iron and Steel Museum, plus a visit to well-preserved beehive coke ovens (Box lunch included)

*NOTE: The Birmingham Conference may prove more expensive than previous meetings due to post-COVID inflation and big-city prices. However, Birmingham's cost of living averages about 10% below the national average. We are attempting to keep costs to a minimum while offering a first-rate experience!*

*Watch the MHA website for more details as they become available.*

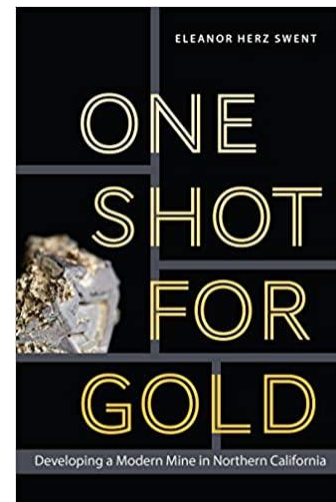
## Recent Publications by MHA Authors

David A. Wolff. *The Savior of Deadwood: James K. P. Miller on the Gold Frontier*. Pierre: South Dakota Historical Society Press, 2021. 364pp. Cloth, \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-941813-35-5



Deadwood survives and thrives today because of its pioneers. Wild Bill and Calamity Jane immediately come to mind. Tourists flock to their graves, pouring money into the local economy. In reality, these two early residents contributed little to Deadwood's long-term survival. Instead, when the placer gold played out and the town's economy began to falter, local businesspeople reinvigorated Deadwood and prevented it from becoming another failed western boom camp. Among the town boosters, James K. P. Miller became the leading promoter and developer. He persuaded outside investors to spend thousands of dollars on the old gold camp and masterminded the construction of a business block, a railroad, and a gold smelter. Because of Miller's efforts, a local observer called him the "Savior of Deadwood." In other words, Deadwood endures today because of Miller's efforts and not because of Wild Bill's and Calamity Jane's accidental deaths.

Eleanor Herz Swent. *One Shot for Gold: Developing a Modern Mine in Northern California*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, May 2021. 278 pages • 6 x 9 in • 10 b/w photographs cloth 978-1-64779-006-6 e-book 978-1-64779-007-3 \$45.00s Mining and Society Series



"One Shot for Gold: Developing a Modern Mine in Northern California," tells of California's highest-producing gold mine of the twentieth century, Homestake Mining company's McLaughlin Mine, that transformed a community and an industry. Eye-witness accounts enliven the story from discovery in 1978 in Napa County, through development in compliance with environmental protection requirements, to reclamation as a University of California Nature Reserve. The recovery system using autoclaves, with no pollution of air or water, has been copied worldwide.

Eleanor is a past president of MHA and directed the Western Mining series at the Oral History Center, UC-Berkeley.

## MHA Nuggets

Join us for MHA Nuggets the third Tuesday of the month on Zoom. Each Nuggets includes a mining related presentation and social time to spend with your MHA friends!

A poster for MHA Nuggets featuring a background image of a mine entrance. The text on the poster includes the title 'MHA Nuggets' in large green letters, followed by dates: 'October 19', 'November 16', 'January 18', 'February 15', and 'March 15'. To the right, it lists times for Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific time zones. Below the dates, it specifies '5 minutes of social time' and '20/25 minute presentation Questions/social time'. At the bottom, it provides the Zoom Meeting Number Below, Passcode: MHA OR, and mentions 'LiveStream on YouTube Mining History Association channel'. A small logo for the Mining History Association is also present.

**MHA Nuggets**  
October 19  
November 16  
January 18  
February 15  
March 15  
8:00 pm Eastern  
7:00 pm Central  
6:00 pm Mountain  
5:00 pm Pacific  
5 minutes of social time  
20/25 minute presentation  
Questions/social time  
Zoom Meeting Number Below, Passcode: MHA  
OR  
LiveStream on YouTube  
Mining History Association channel

We also have openings for talks. Your topic doesn't have to be academic. Topics can include a visit to a historic mining site or town or an interesting little topic that you happened to find out about. Send an email to [mininghistoryassociation@gmail.com](mailto:mininghistoryassociation@gmail.com) if you would like to present an MHA Nugget in the future. Upcoming topics include:

### November Nugget

Nov 16, 2021 7:00 PM Central Time (US & CA)  
Meeting ID: 823 0287 5490 Passcode: MHA  
Topic: *Selected Interviews from the Canadian Mining and Metallurgy Oral History Project*

### January Nugget

Jan 18, 2022 7:00 PM Central Time (US & CA)  
Meeting ID: 815 7502 8305 Passcode: MHA  
Topic: *"Cousin Jack" - A Cornish Mining Captain In Iron Country*  
The story of John Thomas Rosewall and his emigration to the Lake Superior Iron Mining District from Cornwall England.

### February Nugget

Feb 15, 2022 7:00 PM Central Time (US & CA)  
Meeting ID: 839 4156 3476  
Topic: **Open**

### March Nugget

Mar 15, 2022, 07:00 PM Central Time  
Meeting ID: 899 8719 3180  
Topic: *Let's Party: High Society in Leadville, CO 1879-1889*  
Preliminary research into the social elite of Leadville in its formative years.

The presentations will also be livestreamed on YouTube during the presentation and also recorded for later viewing on the Mining History Association YouTube channel. To utilize the chat features or ask questions during or after the program, you should login using Zoom.

## New Iron and Steel Mailing List Started

After attending the SIA national conference, Tony Meadow, [tmeadow@ferrumwest.com](mailto:tmeadow@ferrumwest.com), 510-334-8161, was inspired to set up an informal email list for anyone interested in the iron and steel industry, including industrial archeology, preservation, history, education, business history & labor history to share information. It's up now up and available at <https://groups.io/g/Iron-Steel-SIG>. If you have an interest in iron or steel, please feel free to join!

## Attention Potential Vendors

The MHA will be meeting in Birmingham, Alabama at the Hilton Birmingham UAB from June 23-26, 2022. On Friday and Saturday, June 23 and 24, vendor tables will be available at \$35 per table in a location adjacent to the session rooms.

The Conference attracts people from across the U.S. and world that interested in mining books, artifacts and other collectible items. Persons interested in being a vendor should contact Jim Day at [dayjs@montevallo.edu](mailto:dayjs@montevallo.edu)

*Mining History Association*  
*PO Box 1536*  
*Cape Girardeau MO 63702-1536*

## **Upcoming Events**

### **National Miner's Day**

December 6, 2021

### **SME Conference**

Salt Lake City, Utah

February 27 – March 2, 2022

### **Mining History Association Conference**

Birmingham, Alabama

June 23-26, 2022

### **Australasian Mining History Conference**

Burra, South Australia

Sept. 18-25, 2022

### **Western History Association Conference**

San Antonio, Texas

October 12-15, 2022

The *Mining History News* is published quarterly by and for the members of the **Mining History Association**. Submissions for the newsletter are encouraged.

Deadlines:	Winter issue:	December 15 <sup>th</sup>
	Spring issue:	February 15 <sup>th</sup>
	Summer issue:	June 15 <sup>th</sup>
	Fall issue:	September 15 <sup>th</sup>

Submissions for the newsletter should be sent to Paul R. Spyhalski at [prspyhal@yahoo.com](mailto:prspyhal@yahoo.com) with MHA at the start of the subject line.

***Change of address:*** Please send all address changes to Barbara Clements, Membership Chair, at the following address:

Mining History Association  
PO Box 1536  
Cape Girardeau MO 63702-1536