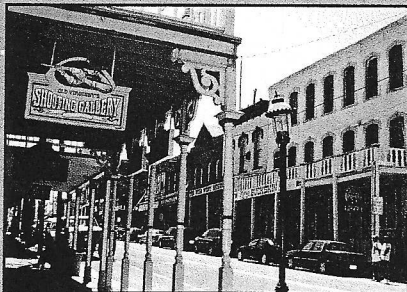


Linking the Past to the Present



Today in Virginia City, in the old saloons on C Street, you can take a walk back in time. Portraits of some of the town's famous citizens line the walls. One famous face on the wall is a man with many names. He was born as James Fennimore. Some people called him Finney or Old Virginny. Finney was one of the earliest miners in the area. He is also credited with naming the town when it was just a tent camp.

The story goes that one night after drinking too much whiskey, Finney broke a bottle over a rock and named the town after his home state of Virginia. From then on, early miners called the settlement Virginia Town. When the word leaked out that silver could be found in the area, the town was soon flooded with fortune seekers. Virginia Town became Virginia City almost overnight.



This is a modern photograph of Virginia City's famous C Street. Compare it to the photograph of C Street on the previous page. In what ways has the street changed?

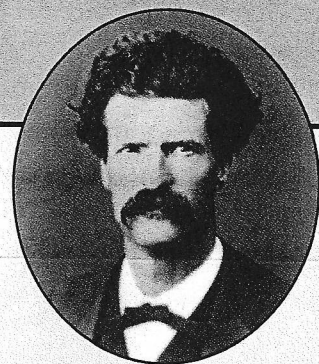
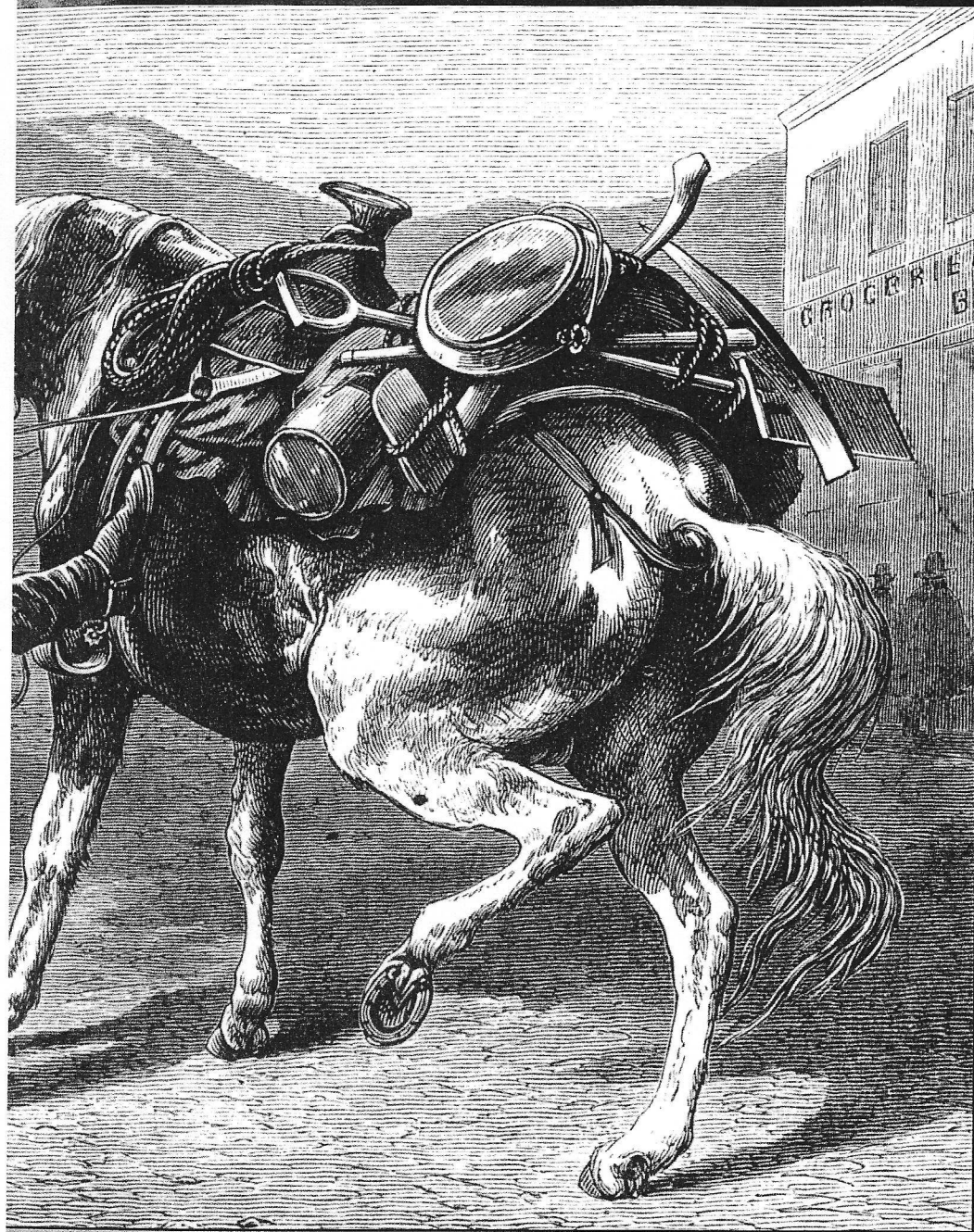


Sometimes prospectors tried to load their animals with too many supplies.

Life on the Comstock

Virginia City during the Comstock boom was an exciting place to live. It was the most important settlement between Denver and San Francisco. Miners worked day and night. The whole town buzzed with activity. There were shop owners, saloon keepers, teachers, and preachers. The city also had its share of trouble. People fighting, stealing, and breaking the law were just a few of the everyday problems.

There were also many interesting people living in Virginia City. One man named John Mackay found large silver deposits nearby. It was actually one of the biggest silver deposits in all of North



Mark Twain

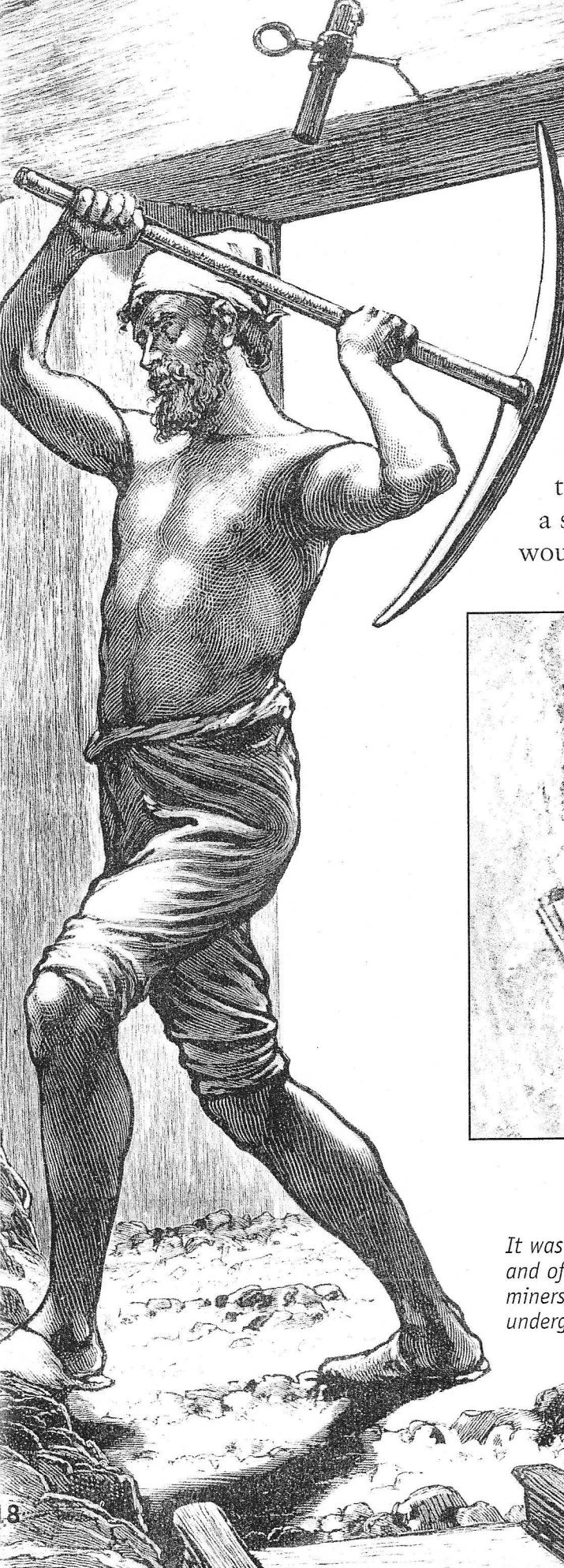
Some people call Mark Twain one of America's best-loved authors. His real name was Samuel Clemens. He wrote wonderful stories like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. People of all ages have enjoyed his stories.

He first came to Nevada to work as a clerk for his brother, Orion Clemens. For a short time, he also tried his luck as a prospector with the hope of becoming rich. But he never did strike it rich. He began using the name Mark Twain when he was writing for the *Territorial Enterprise*. *Roughing It* is the book he wrote about life in Virginia City. Here is a sample of what he wrote:

There were military companies, fire companies, brass bands, banks, hotels, theatres,...wide-open gambling palaces, ...street fights, murders, inquests, riots, a whiskey mill every fifteen steps,...half a dozen jails..., and some talk of building a church.

America. Mackay used much of his money to help people in need. Later, his fortune was used to help build the Mackay School of Mines at the University of Nevada in Reno.

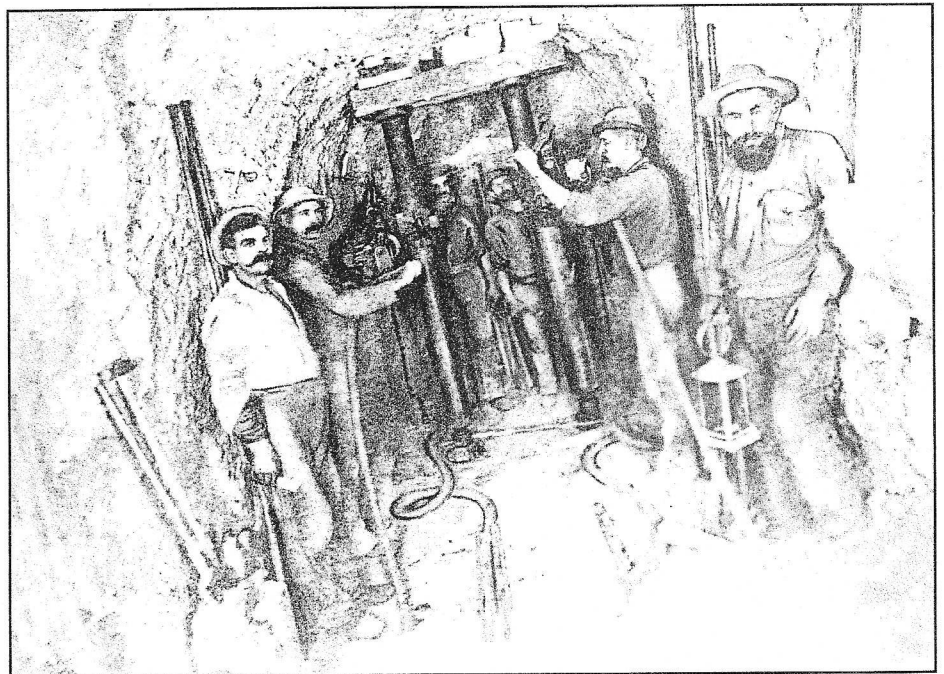
Two famous writers also lived in Virginia City for a time. Mark Twain and Dan DeQuille were young reporters for one of Virginia City's newspapers. It was called the *Territorial Enterprise*. They wrote about things that happened during the Comstock days. Some of their articles were printed in newspapers across the country and around the world. Both men wrote books about life on the Comstock. Thousands of people learned more about frontier life by reading their books.



Building Better Mines

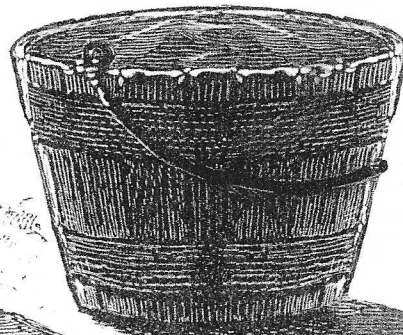
Not long after the discovery of the Comstock Lode, miners learned they had to dig deep shafts and long tunnels to get the ore out. The Comstock's ore *deposit* was larger and deeper than any other find had been. A deposit is a natural pocket of minerals found in the earth.

Miners also found it difficult to keep the deep tunnels of the Comstock from caving in on them. Soon a system was created to help stop cave-ins. This system would later be used in mines around the world.



These miners were drilling for silver in the Comstock Mines, 1650 feet underground.

It was very dark and often hot for miners working in underground tunnels.



Square-Set Timbering

Early methods used by miners to keep the tunnels from caving in didn't always work. At first, logs about 20 feet long were placed in the roofs of the tunnels. Then posts were used to hold the logs up. Sometimes miners bolted logs together because the tunnels were so long.

The miners soon realized the logs and posts weren't strong enough to prevent cave-ins. There were still too many people who died when a tunnel *collapsed*, or caved-in.

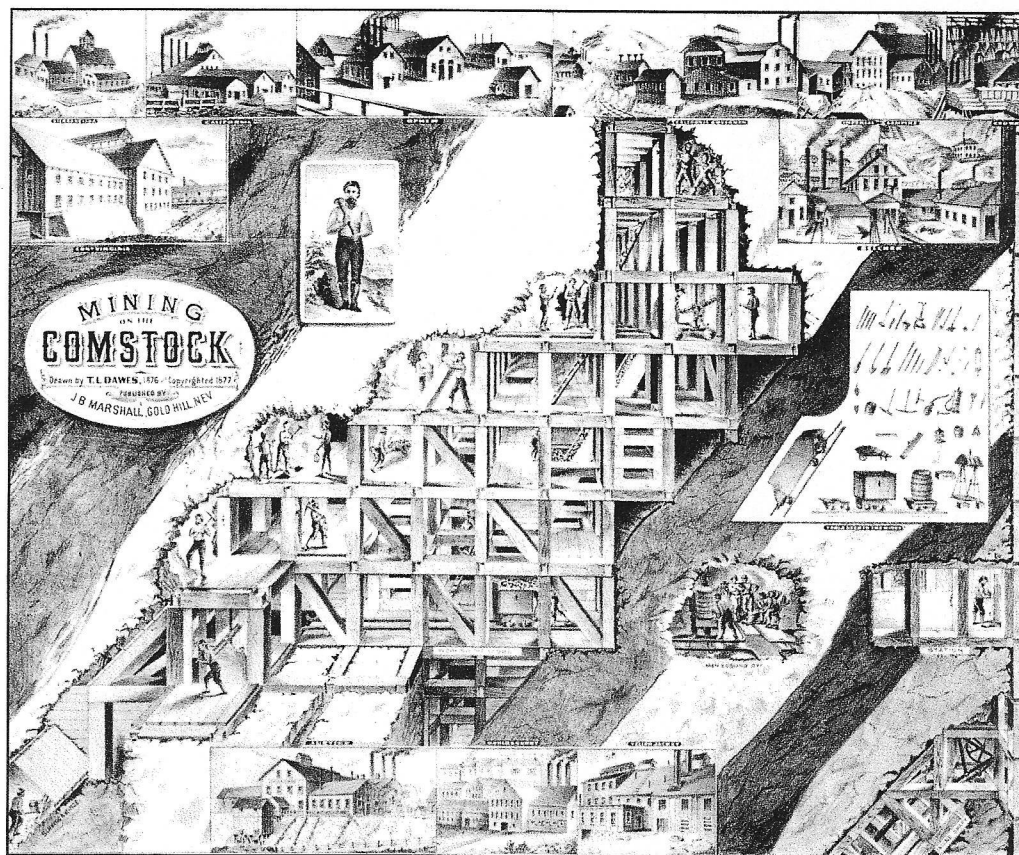
One mining company hired a German man to help solve the cave-in problem. His name was named Philipp Deidesheimer. He was an engineer who began making boxes with 4-6 foot logs, or timbers. He called them *cribs*. The cribs could be stacked on top of each other or placed side by side. They were very strong and could hold up the top and sides of a tunnel. Sometimes cribs were filled with rock to make them more stable.

Deidesheimer's invention was called square-set timbering. It helped make underground mines much safer. Before long, all the Comstock mines were using square-set timbering. This method was used to make mines safer all over the world.

More Dangers

Underground mines had many other dangers besides cave-ins. As miners went deep in the earth the air was hot and hard to breath. It was also bad for their lungs. Pockets of hot air sometimes reached 100 degrees or more.

Falling rocks and explosions from old sticks of dynamite were also common causes of injury or death. Sometimes dynamite left by early miners blew up without warning.



*Phillipp Deidesheimer failed to protect his invention of square-set timbering from being stolen by others. Today, inventors can protect their ideas by having them **patented**.*

Mining Accidents

Accidents killed many miners in Comstock mines. Here is the accident list for one year:

| | |
|---|---|
| Falls into deep mining shafts | 6 |
| Heat stroke | 6 |
| Powder explosions | 4 |
| Cave-ins | 4 |
| Machinery problems | 5 |
| Crushed by cage carrying supplies | 1 |