

From Tents to Towns

Presented by Frances Rice
September 2026

175th Rice Family Reunion Carson City, Nevada

49ers to 59ers



49ers to 59ers

Is finding gold easy?



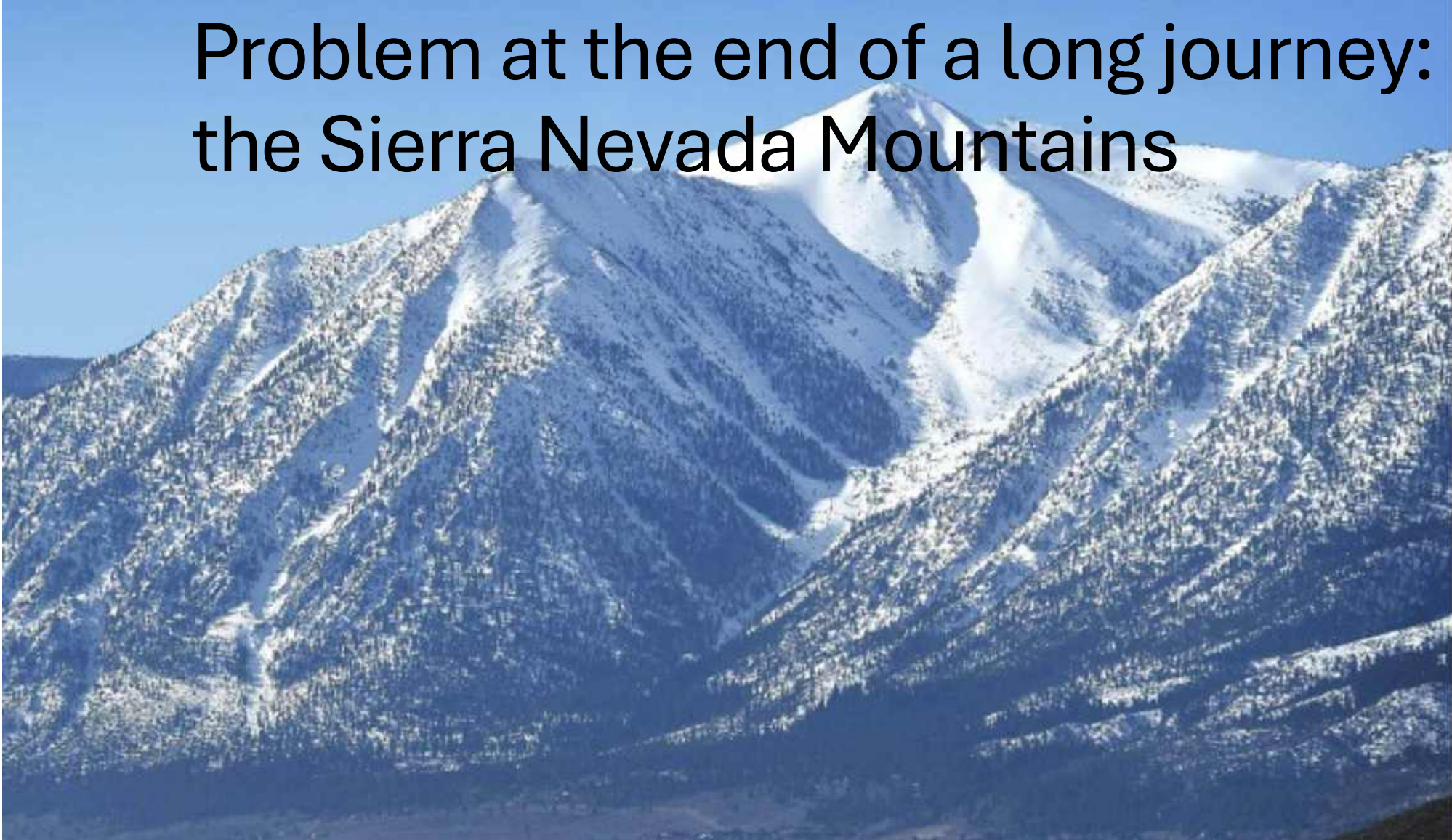
49ers to 59ers

Wagon Train Routes to California



49ers to 59ers

Problem at the end of a long journey:
the Sierra Nevada Mountains



49ers to 59ers

- One idea...go farther into the Sierras
- Another idea... remembering the pioneers' stories of finding gold as they rested on the eastern side of the Sierras before the BIG PUSH into California, go to Nevada in the Utah Territory.

By 1855 the original surface gold in the California goldfields were gone!



What can a prospector do?

49ers to 59ers

Mining in the Utah Territory had challenges

Little Water



Near
Dayton.
1-1 ½ oz.
per day

Lots of Water



1849-California

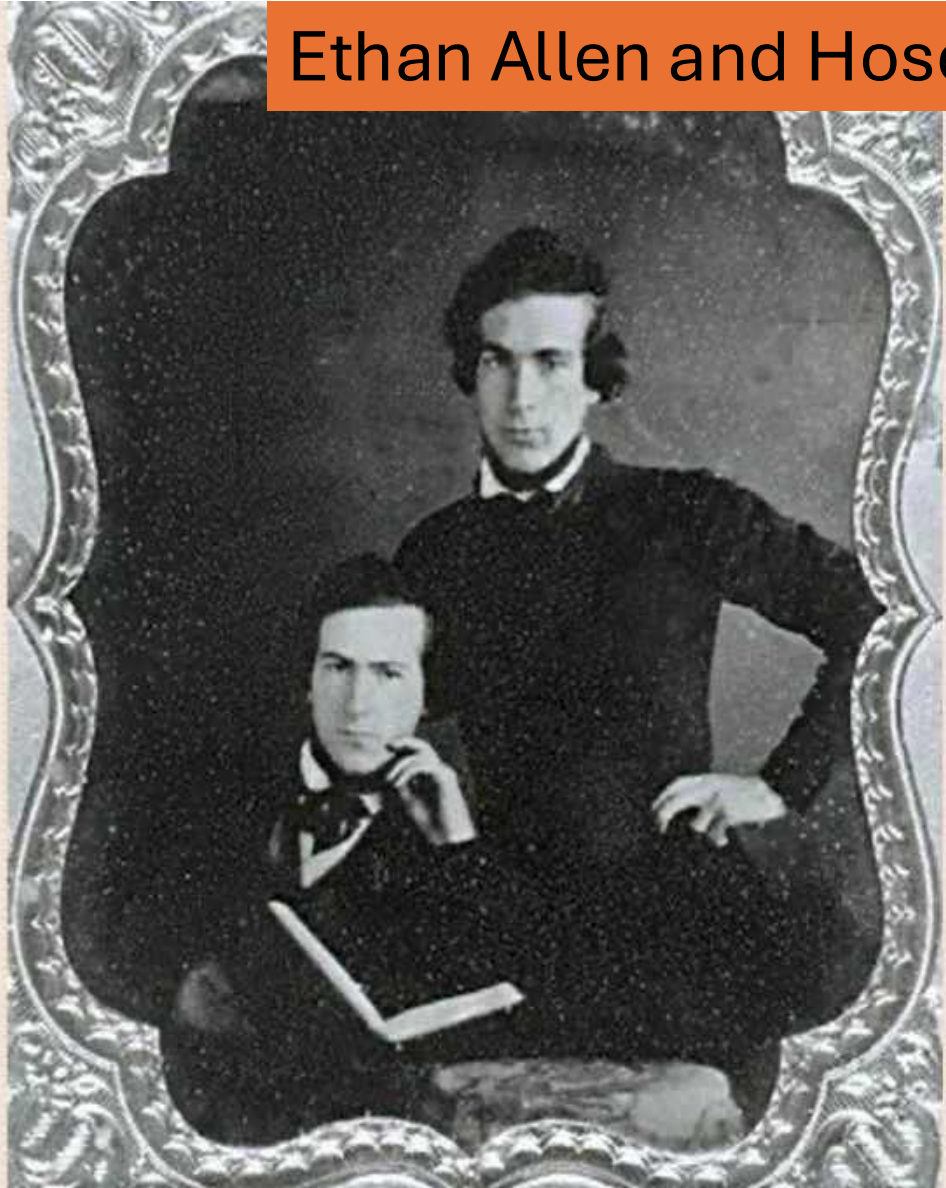
49ers to 59ers

Other challenges:

- Little drinking water, the only creek ran dry half the year
- Most springs had mineral deposits making them impossible to drink
- No infrastructure; even ore assays had to be done in California
- And the famous BLUE GOO

49ers to 59ers

Ethan Allen and Hosea Ballou Grosh, 1857



Find promising ore near Eagle Valley

Head to California for Assay

- Both parish in route

Henry Comstock left to tend cabin

49ers to 59ers



Henry Comstock

- Henry Comstock said he now owned the Grosh Brothers claim.
- Sells Claim for \$11,000.

49ers to 59ers

1859 Peter O'Reilly and Pat McLaughlin asked Snowshoe Thompson to take the blue-ish grey clay material to an assay office. It proved out at \$3000 per ton...when silver was only \$1.60 per ounce.



Snowshoe Thompson

49ers to 59ers

The 1859 gold rush and Comstock Boom is Started!

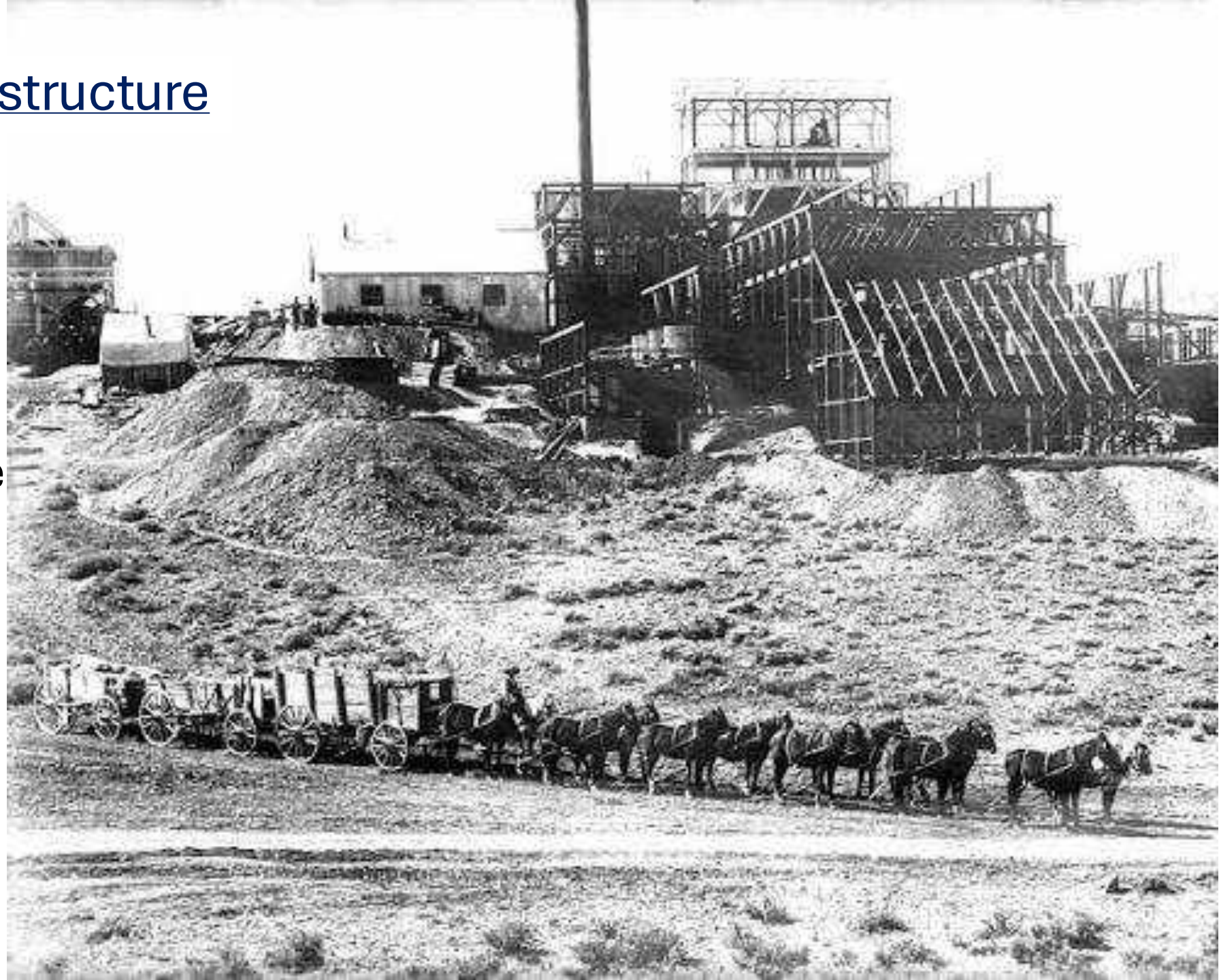
GOLD was discovered the streams in Eagle Valley!

GOLD was discovered in Gold Canyon!

GOLD was discovered at Virginia City/Mount Davidson!

Deep Mining Infrastructure

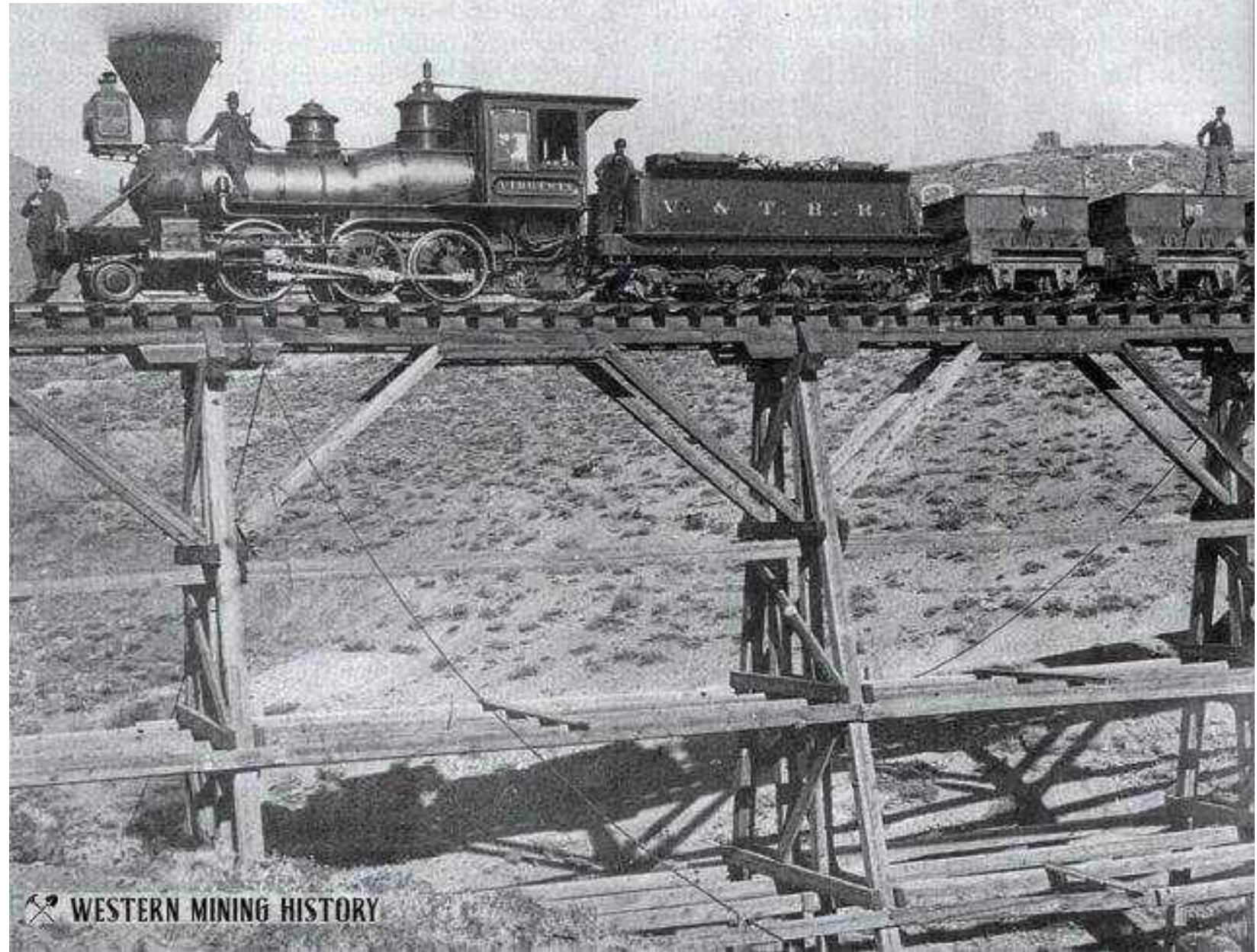
Before the railroad connected Virginia City to Carson City, ore wagons would deliver high-grade ore to be further processed at mills near Carson City



Deep Mining Infrastructure

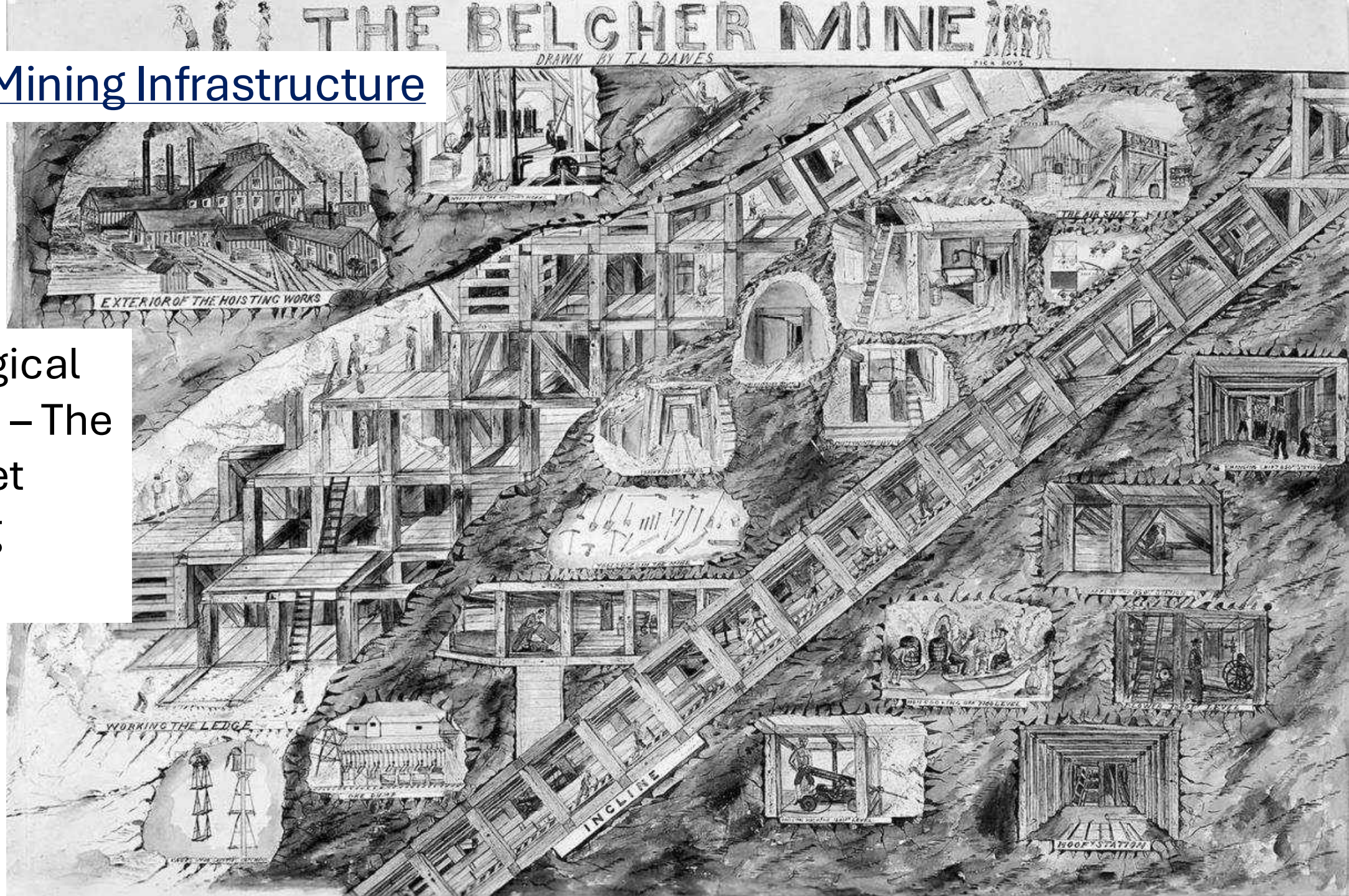
V & T Railroad

Carson City To
Virginia City, 1870



Deep Mining Infrastructure

Technological
Advances – The
Square-set
Timbering
System



Deep Mining Infrastructure

Belcher Mine in Virginia City
Using Deidesheimer's
Square-set Timbering



Deep Mining Infrastructure

Virginia City
1870



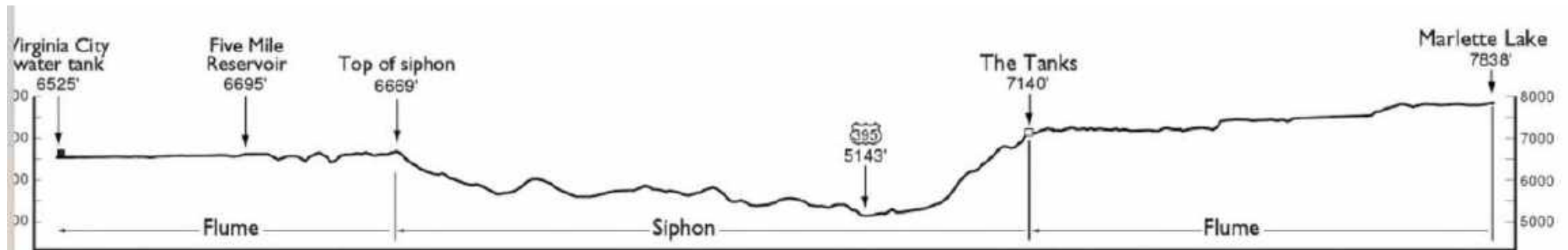
Deep Mining Infrastructure

Pure Drinking Water from Lake Tahoe Area to Virginia City

1873-Marlette Lake Water System designed by Hermann Schussler carried pure clean water from Marlette Lake which is higher than Lake Tahoe through a high-pressure gravity-fed pipeline delivering Pure Clean Drinking Water to Virginia City and towns. No pumps!

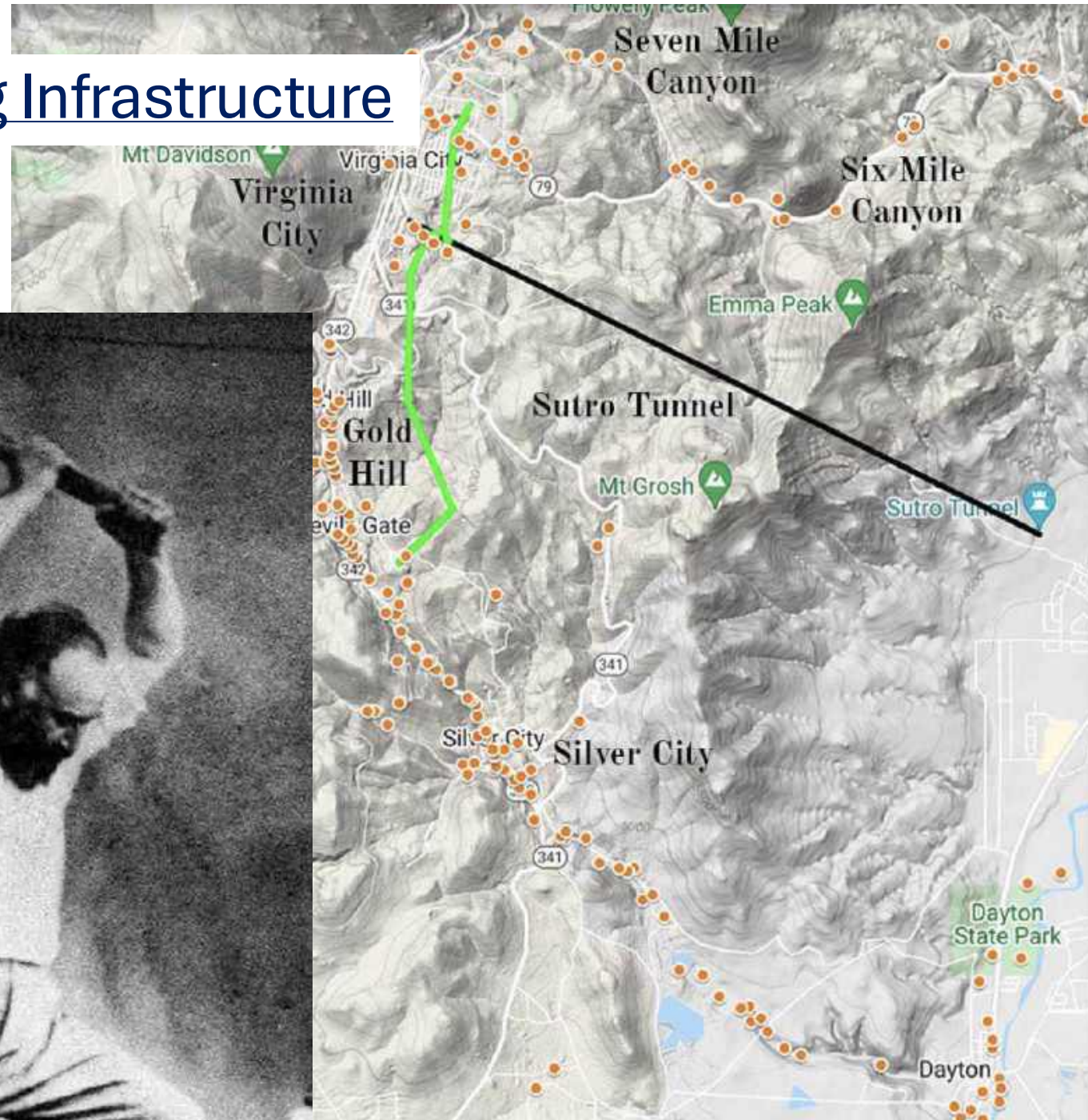
Project was planned carefully! Each section of pipe was labeled with Schussler on-site to be sure each section was installed correctly.

Four miles in six weeks !



Deep Mining Infrastructure

Sutro Tunnel
1878



Cities Are Established

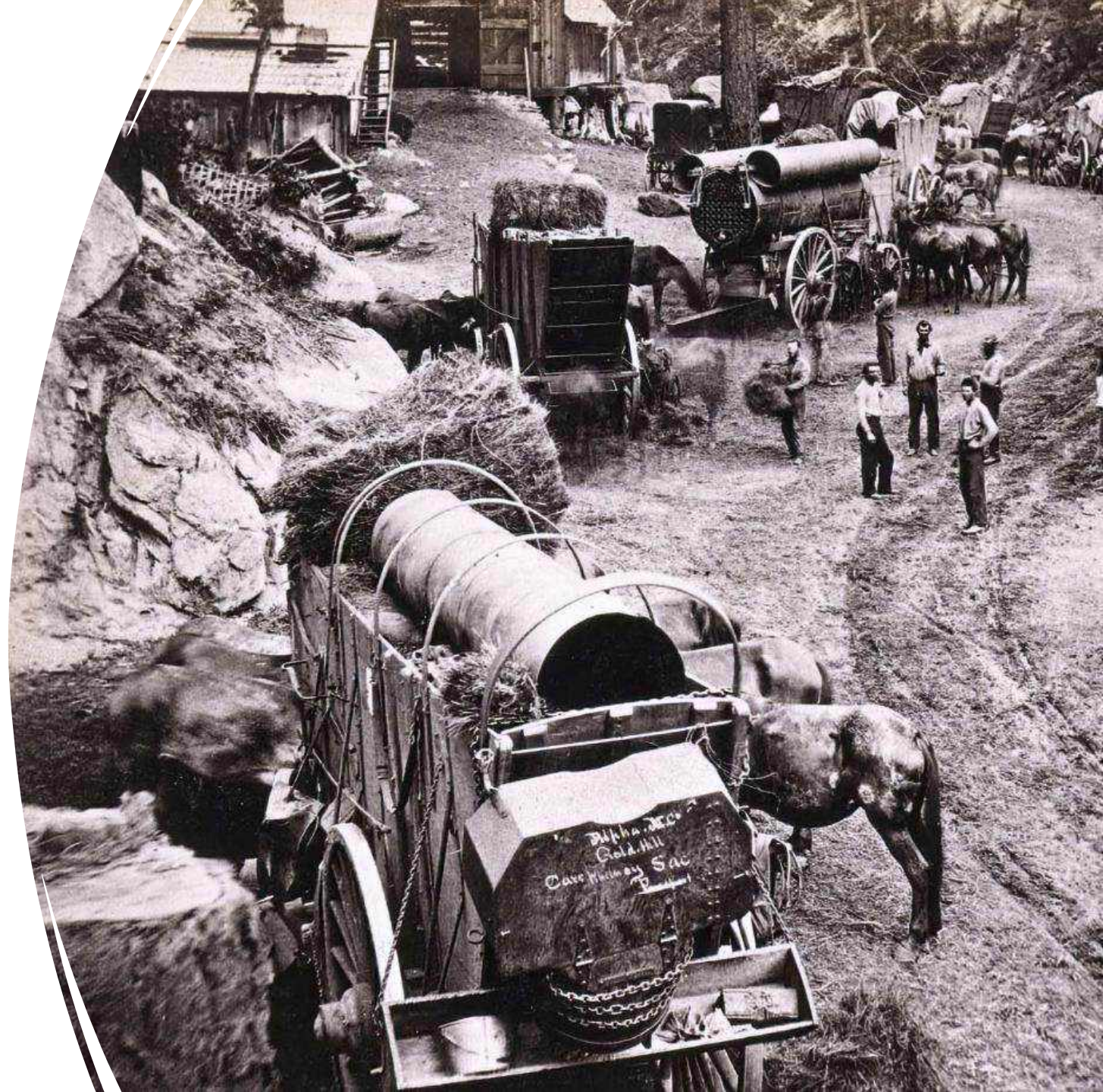
How do you get supplies from California to Nevada?

Bigler Tole Road



Cities Are Established

How do you
get lots of
supplies to
Nevada?



Cities Are Established

How do you
get supplies
to Nevada in
the winter?

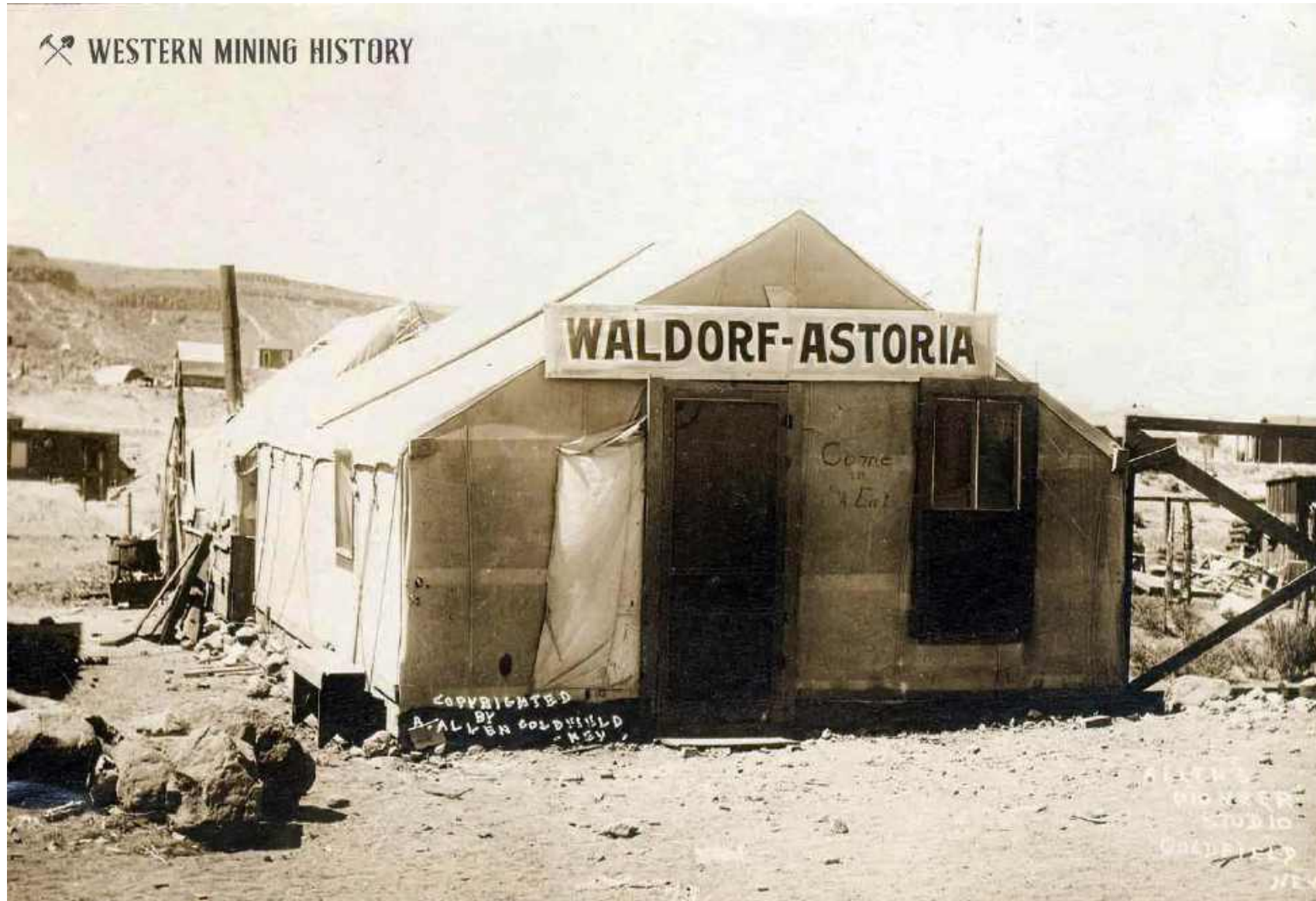


Cities Are Established

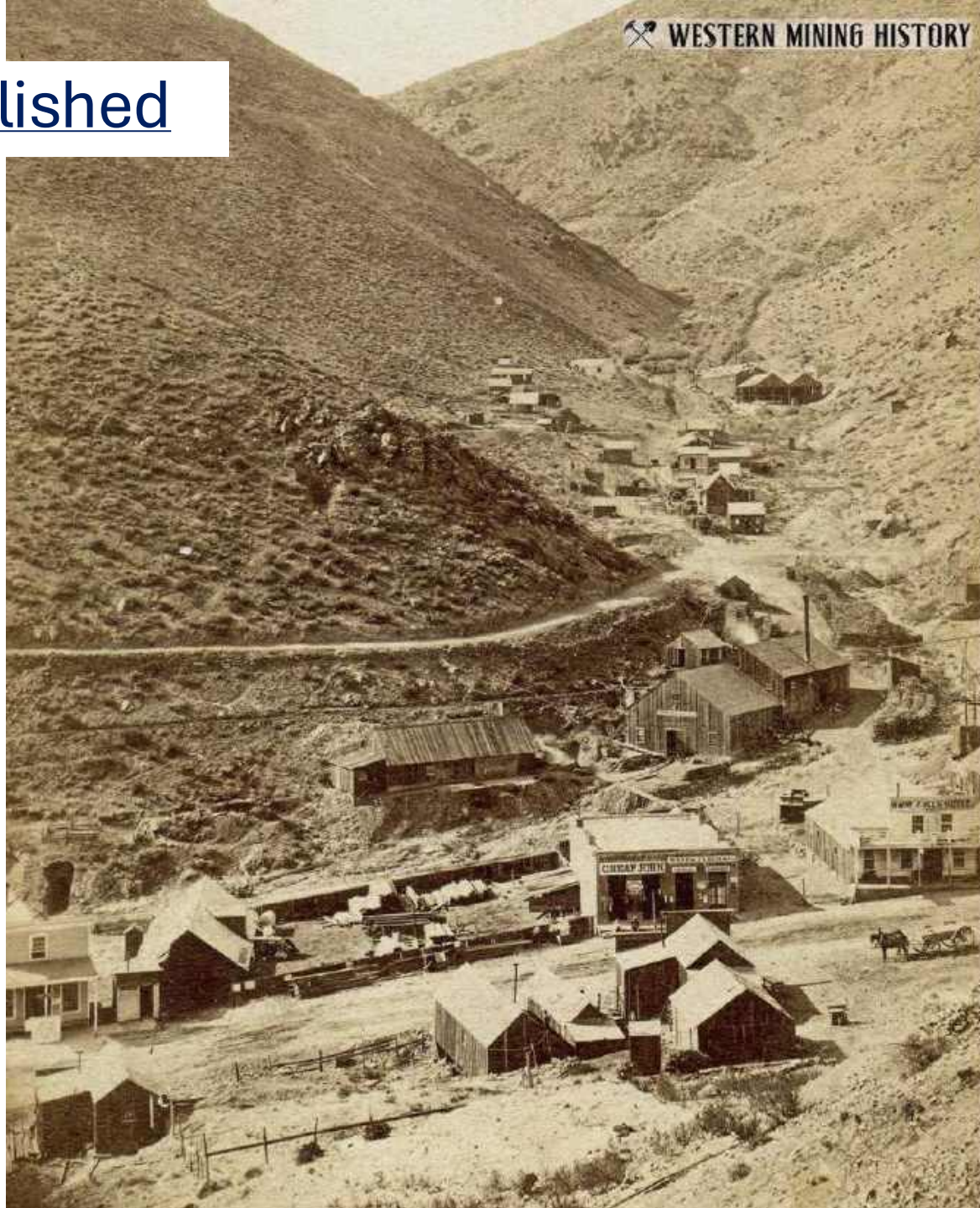


Enterprising folks!

Cities Are Established



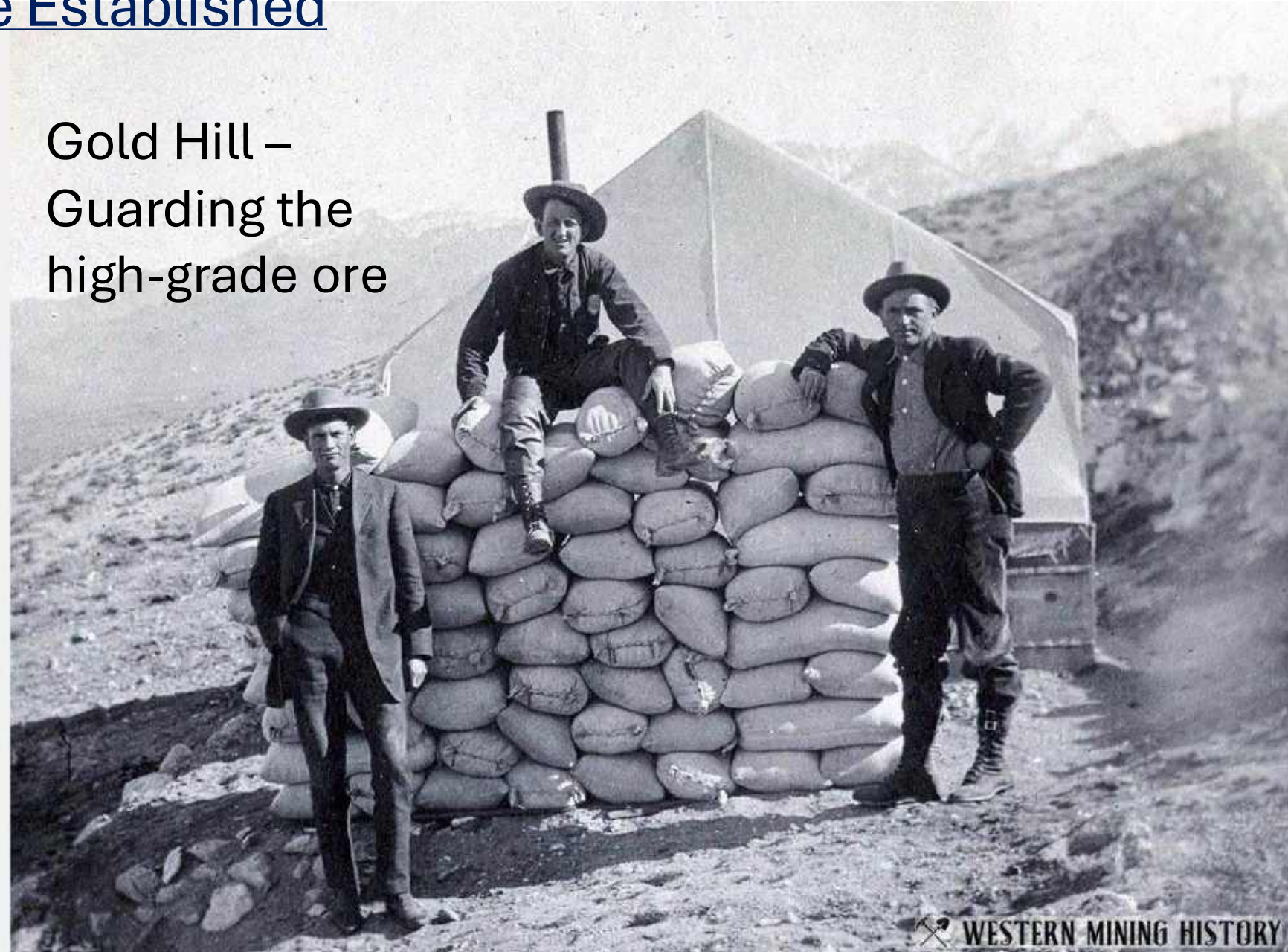
Cities Are Established



Gold Hill Nv

Cities Are Established

Gold Hill –
Guarding the
high-grade ore

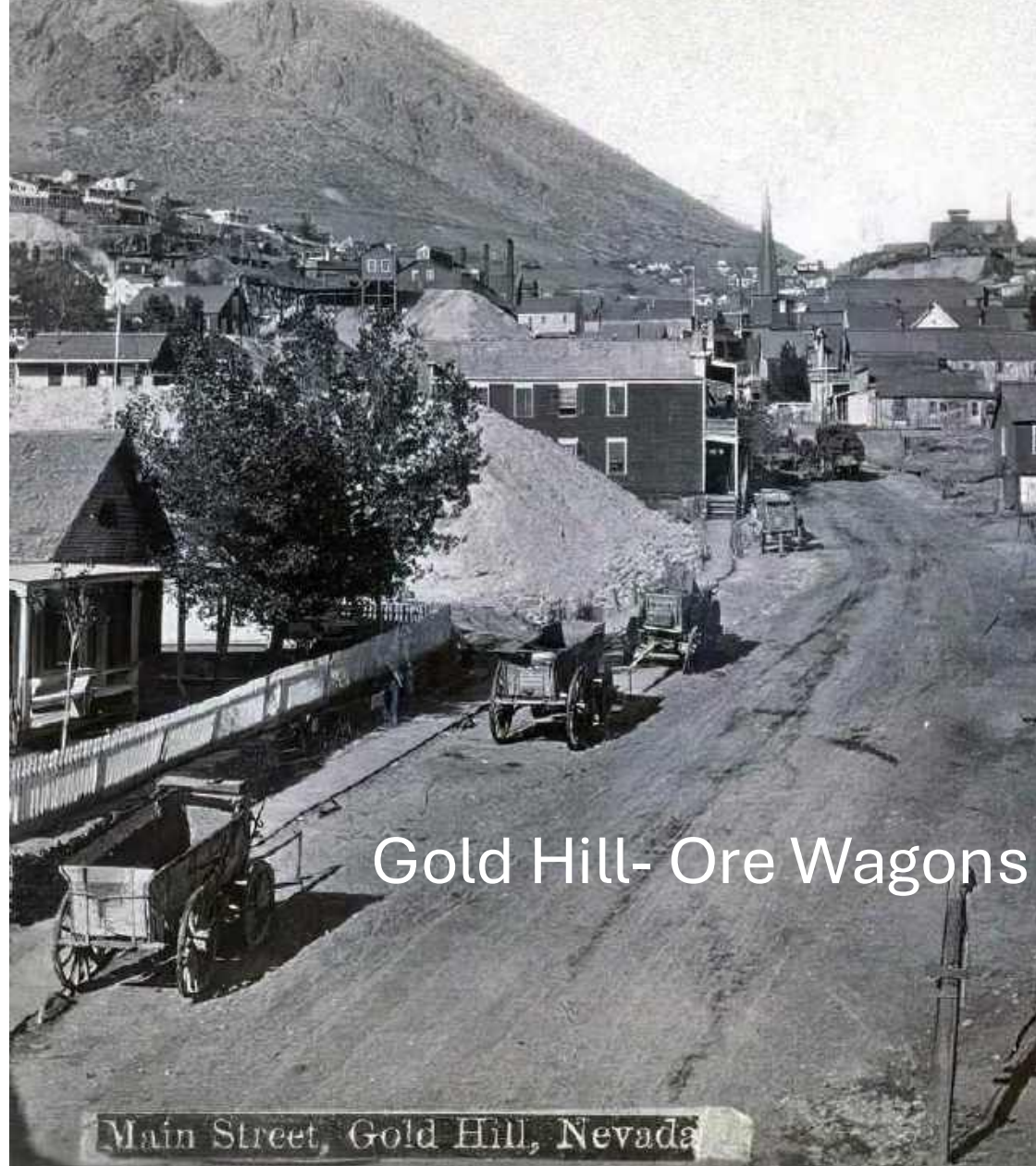


Cities Are Established

Gold Hill –
Sometimes there
was a lot to guard



Cities Are Established

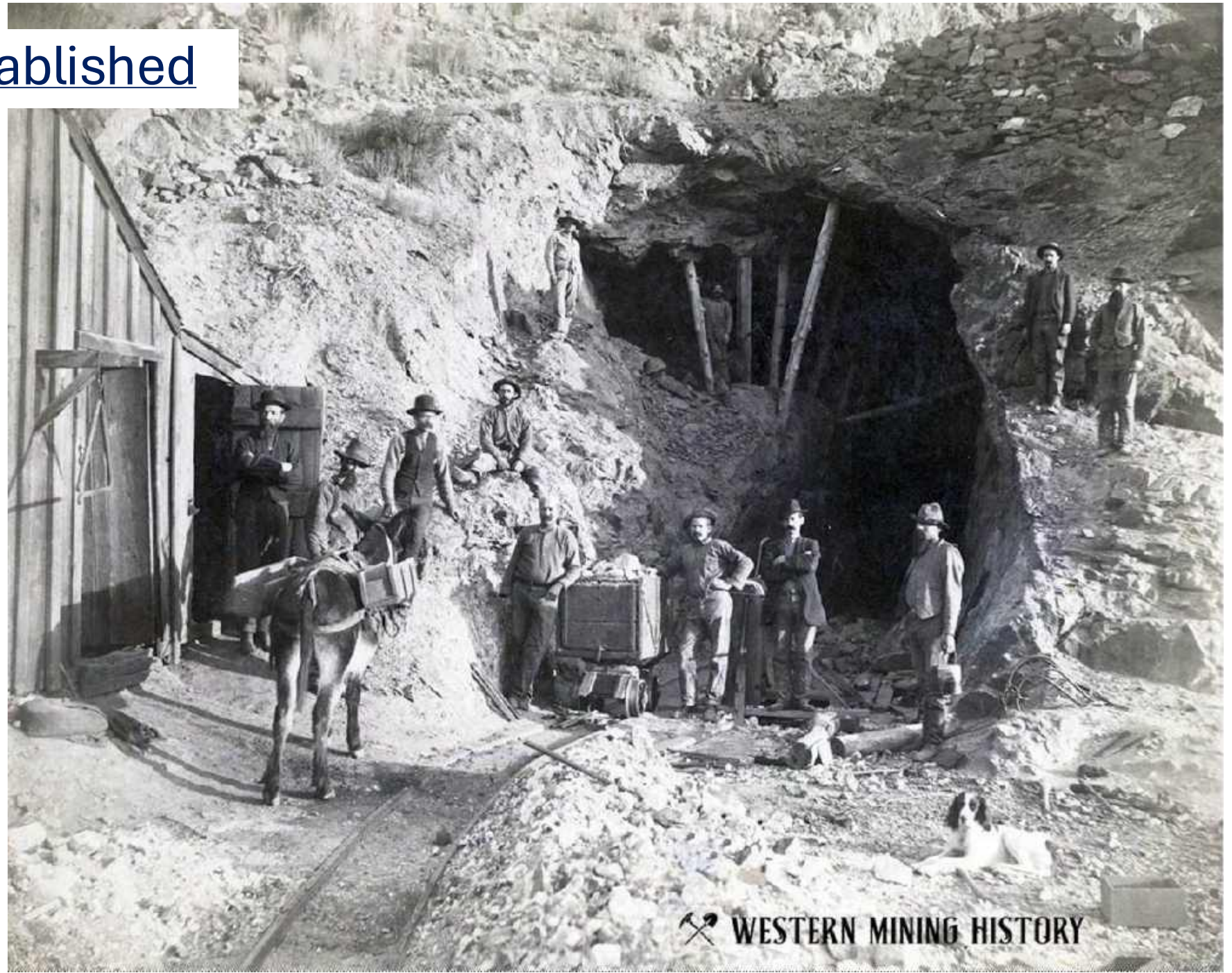


Gold Hill- Ore Wagons

Main Street, Gold Hill, Nevada

Cities Are Established

Gold Hill, NV



Cities Are Established



Gold Hill at its
Zenith, 1975

Cities Are Established

VIRGINIA CITY IN 1859



Cities Are Established

Old Virginia Fennimore



Cities Are Established

VIRGINIA CITY AT ITS
ZENITH 1875 – Just
before fire that
destroyed $\frac{3}{4}$ town.

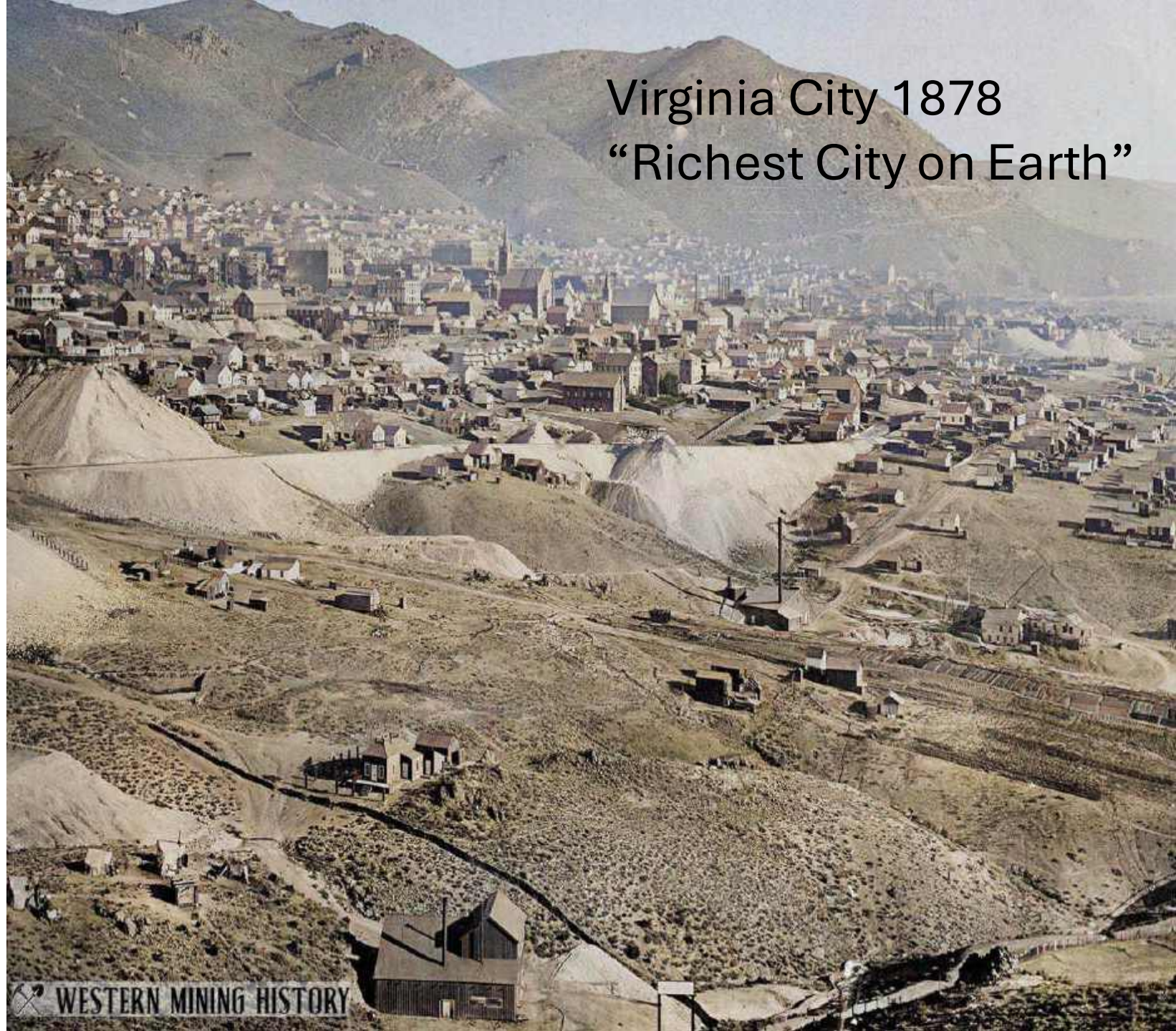
25,000 PEOPLE
239 STAMP UNITS



Agustus Koch drawing

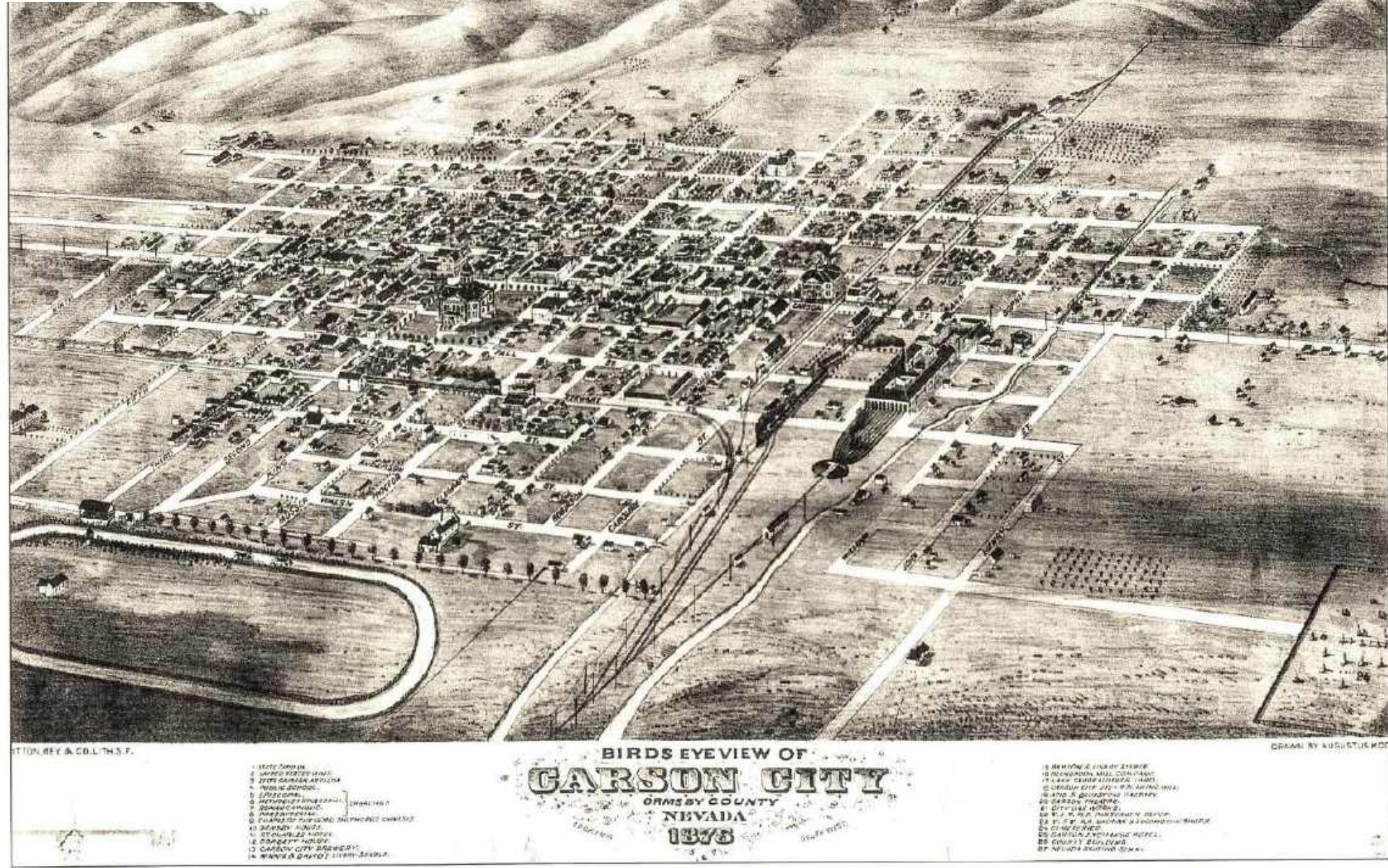
Cities Are Established

- Virginia City's elevation is 6280 feet above sea level
- (Denver's elevation is 5280 feet above sea level)



Virginia City 1878
“Richest City on Earth”

Cities Are Established



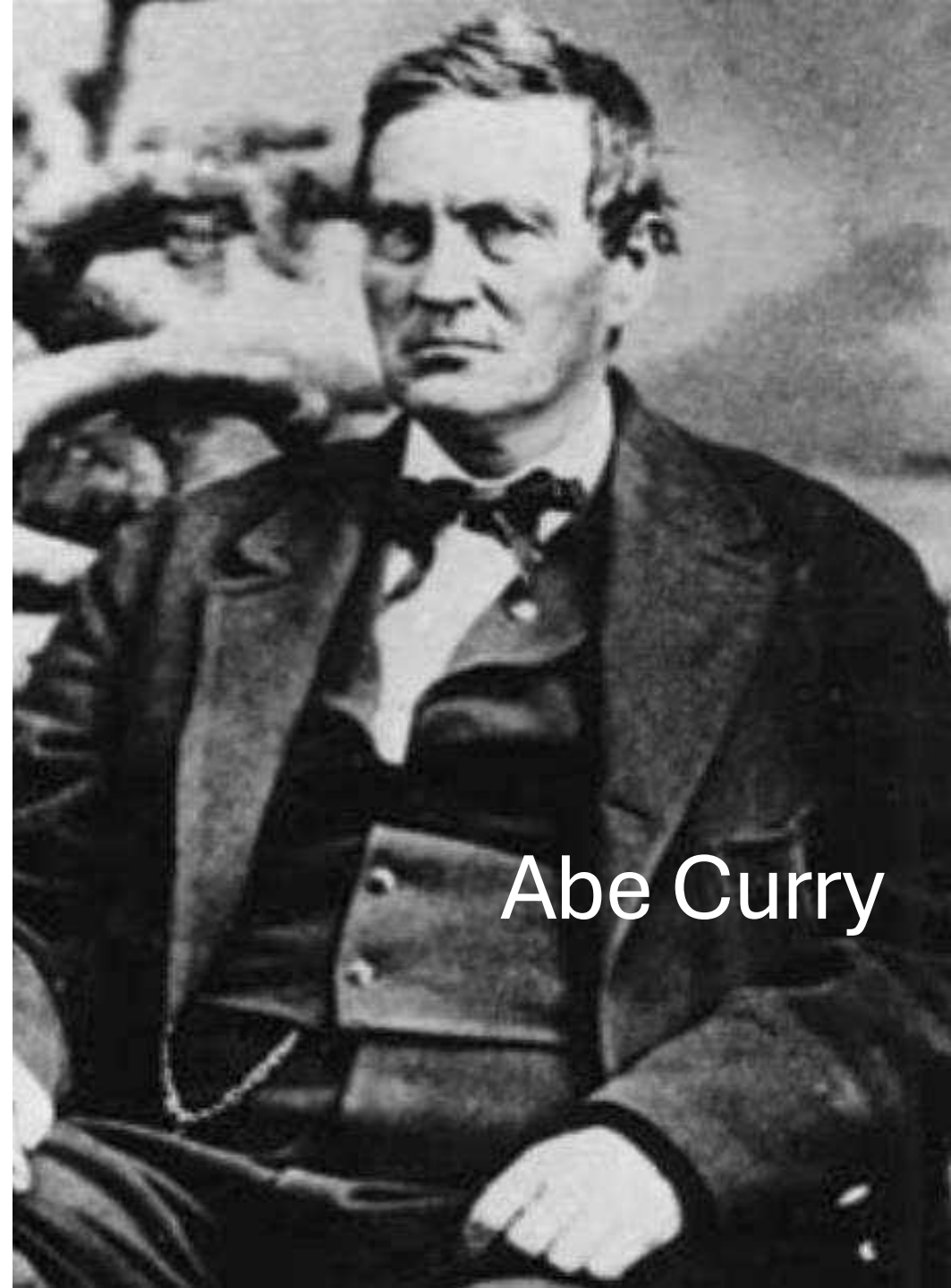
Cities Are Established

Abe Curry

Carson City was in the right
location to grow and prosper!

Cities Are Established

- Abe Curry was a developer from California who, along with his partners: Ben Green, Frank Proctor, and John Musser, brought land in the Eagle Valley with plans to build a city that would one day be the capital of the territory.
- Curry set aside 10 acres for the future capital building along with town lots to be sold for homes and businesses.
- Curry actively campaigned to have a post office, territorial capital, and a prison built in his new city called Carson City after Kit Carson, an early explorer of the area.



Abe Curry

Cities Are Established



Ore processing mill
along Carson River

Cities Are Established



Plaza that would become
site of Nevada State Capital

Cities Are Established



Cities Are Established



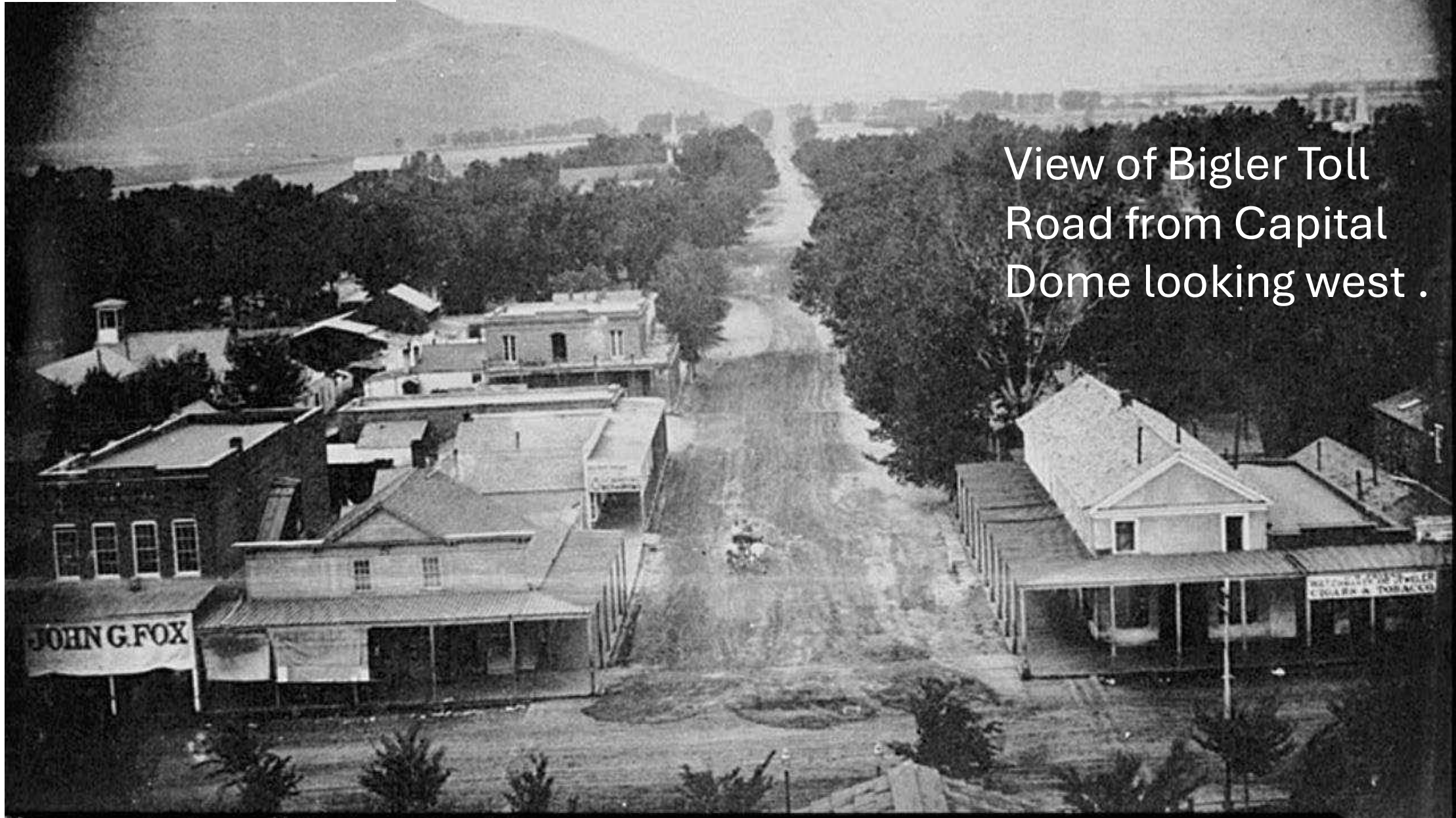
ST. CHARLES HOTEL, CARSON CITY, NEW YORK

Cities Are Established

Newly built Nevada
State Capital



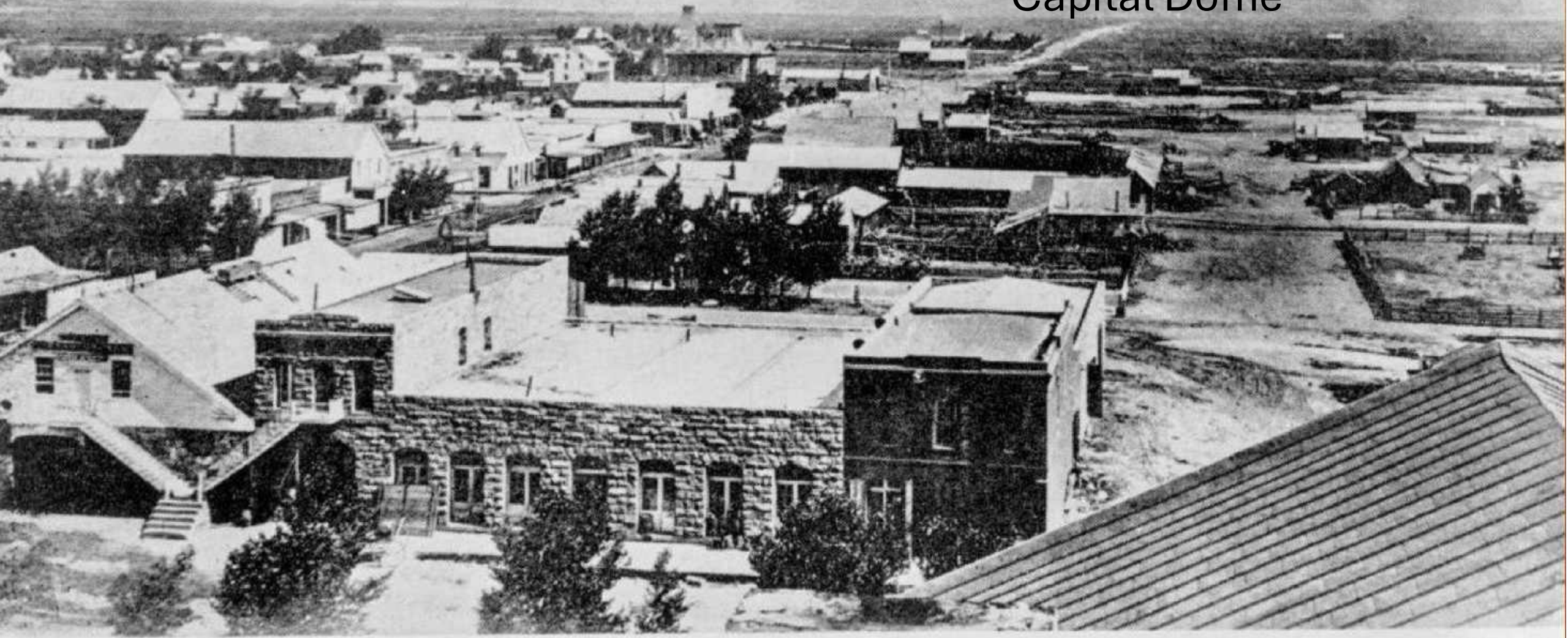
Cities Are Established



View of Bigler Toll
Road from Capital
Dome looking west .

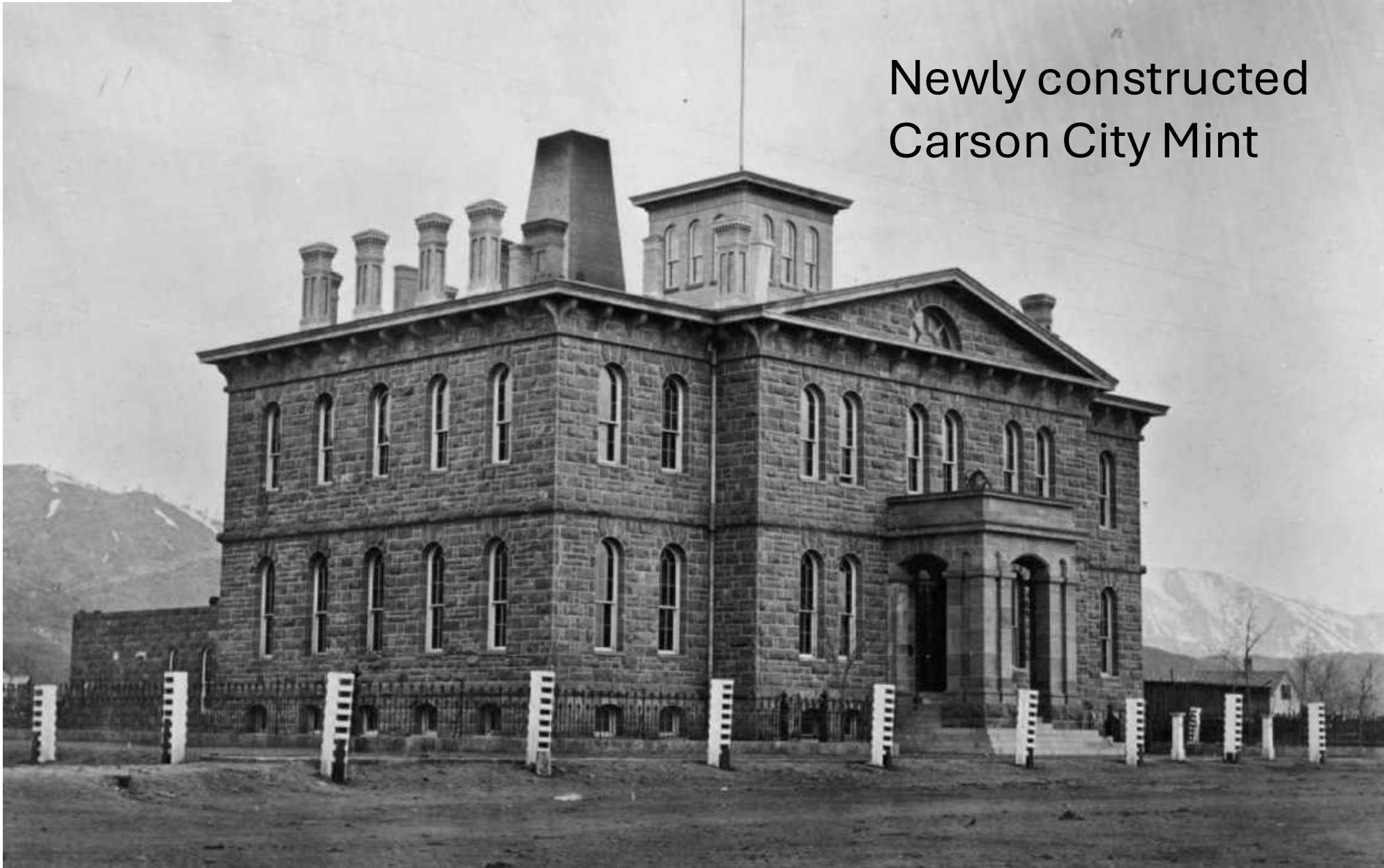
Cities Are Established

View of Carson Street
looking North from State
Capital Dome



Cities Are Established

Newly constructed
Carson City Mint



Cities Are Established



Curry Engine Company
circa 1868.

Members of the Curry Engine Company posed in front of the Sweeney Building, circa 1868. View looking North, showing Curry Street Facade of Sweeney Building. Courtesy Nevada Historical Society.

Cities Are Established

The first Territorial Legislature met on October 1, 1861, at Abe Curry's Warm Springs hotel in Carson City.



Cities Are Established



Stewart-Nye House

Cities Are Established



Abe Curry's Crowning Glory –The V&T
Round House and Work Shops

V. & T. ROUND HOUSE CARSON CITY NEV.

Cities Are Established

Carson City Post Office



Cities Are Established

Decline of the Comstock Lode:

- 1880 – 1882 - Severe depletion of the gold and silver ore
- Mining in the deep mine shafts became too expensive
- Other mining sites like Bowie and Goldfield were being developed
- Small mining ventures still happened at the Comstock Lode
- 1918 – Pumps that removed the water from the deepest tunnels turned OFF.

Cities Are Established

Comstock Statistics

- Over 700 miles of tunnels connecting Gold Hill and Virginia City
- Deepest mine shaft was 3250 feet. It was called the Combination Shaft which was
- a joint venture of Savage, Chollar-Potosi and Hale & Norcross mining companies.
- Highest paid miners in the whole world at \$4.00 weekly
- From 1859 to 1900, Comstock Lode produced 8.3 million ounces of gold,
- And 192 ounces of silver yielding \$400 million in 1870 dollars
- (\$10.2 billion dollars in 2026)
- Engineering marvels that made mining safer