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## THE BIG BONANZA

(N. Y. Tribune, 8/27/75)

Nevada Silver Mines.

History of the Consolidated Virginia Mine - Discovery of The Big Bonanza - Interior of the Mine - A great Product The Present Year.

(From a Staff Correspondent of the Tribune)

Virginia City, Nev., July 31 - The Mines in this city are so marvelous in extent and operation that I should hesitate to give the facts in relation to them were they not certified by proofs so convincing that doubt is impossible. There is a common belief in the East that there is nothing in which such gigantic swindling is done as in mining stock, and when the Big Bonanza was struck I well remember the incredulity expressed on all sides. Mining to a large class of people means swindling, and it is not uncommon to find persons who think it is only necessary to dig a hole in the ground, organize a stock company, and begin to sell shares in order to get rich.

Whatever mining may be in other localities, it is a stupendous reality here, and is carried on with the same precision and business sagacity as any legitimate manufacturing business in New England, New York, or New Jersey. There is no pretense, no noise and bustle, no pompous manifestation of wealth, no impassable gulf between the \$4 miner and the twenty million capitalist. I have been here nearly two weeks, and no day has passed during that time in which I have not visited the mines, and each day I have seen three men each worth not less than twenty millions of dollars, going about quietly among the men in the common garb of the laborer, with nothing to distinguish them from the ordinary mine hand. No diamond studs, no big rings, no flashy watch chains, no broadcloth. One of these gentlemen (Mackay) has spent years in foreign travel, and has mingled in polite society in other countries; another (Flood) who spends most of his time in San Francisco rules the market here, and is to this coast what Commodore Vanderbilt is to New York; the other (Fair) is accustomed to direct hundreds of men and employ millions of capital. Yet these three men, when seen about their mines, would be taken for foremen or overseers. They attend to their legitimate business as miners and earn handsome dividends for their stockholders. These gentlemen own a majority of the stock of the Consolidated Virginia, the California, the Best & Belcher, the Gould & Curry, the Savage, the Hale & Norcross, the Utah, the Occidental, and many small mines. The greatest mine in the United States, and probably in the world, is the Consolidated Virginia, the mine of the Big Bonanza. The figures relating to this mine are so enormous that I should not tax the credulity of the reader if I had not examined the books, assessor's returns, shipper's receipts, accounts with the Government, and had the testimony of my own senses in addition to the official papers.

The stock of the Consolidated Virginia consists of 108,000 shares, par value \$100 each. It sells for \$340 to \$360 a share, and



pays more dividends each year than the original par value of the shares. Of these 108,000 shares, Mackay, Flood, Fair, and O'Brien owns 62,000. The California mine has 540,000 shares, at \$100 par value, now selling at from \$60 to \$70. The firm owns 295,000 of these shares. The Best & Belcher mine has 108,000 shares; the Gould & Curry the same number; the Savage has 16,000; the Hale & Norcross, 16,000; the Utah, 20,000; and the Occidental, 40,000. As before stated, the gentlemen named own the majority of the stock of all these mines. In addition, they have nine mills which must be worth several millions of dollars; they own one-half of the Virginia and Gold Hill Water Works, capital \$5,000,000, besides flumes, factories, stocks, real estate, etc.

### The Yield of The Consolidated Virginia.

The marvelous richness of the Consolidated Virginia mine can scarcely be realized. We are so accustomed in public affairs to speak of millions of dollars with little understanding of how much money it is that it has become the custom to speak thus with as little hesitation as we speak of hundreds. I suppose that great national blessing - the National debt - has made the sound of millions familiar. A million of dollars is more money than can be counted, dollar by dollar, in one week by a single individual, and it is therefore imperative in dealing with the figures that a due sense of their meaning and importance should be considered, for in that is their only interest.

We were in the melting and assay building. Bars of gold and silver, worth from \$3,000 to \$4,000 each were stacked up by hundreds in the rooms and halls, wagons were being loaded with them, and they were thrown about as if they were so many pigs of iron. In one room half a dozen men were working over as many furnaces, melting the silver and molding it into bars - very hot work. In the mine, close by, 650 men were employed night and day, with no Sunday play-spell. Engines, hoisting works, machine shops, chutes, railroads, sawmills and buildings large enough for the world's fair, were on every hand, in value reaching into the millions. The machinery in one mill cost a quarter of a million of dollars, and one engine in the Savage mine cost \$120,000. In the Consolidated Virginia mine alone 1,000,000 feet of lumber are used every month for bulkheads, and 40,000 cords of wood are buried in one year in the several mills and mines belonging to Mackay, Fair & Co. They have between 3,000 and 4,000 men employed at an average price of \$4 per day. The pay-roll of one mine, which I saw myself for the month of June, amounted to about \$70,000. The firm pays \$40,000 a quarter, or \$200,000 a year, as tax on the production of bullion for one mine. The discount and express charges on bullion to San Francisco cost the Company about \$80,000 a month. The assay department, spoken of above, is able to melt, bar, assay, and stamp \$100,000 a day in gold and silver bars in combination, the gold being about 45 per cent. The weight of the bars is from 90 to 110 pounds.

### Characteristics of Virginia City.

The letters of introduction which made me known to Mr. Mackay and the respectable company in which I found myself, were sufficient to insure me unusual opportunities and most patient courtesies. We arrived here at about 10 o'clock on a Sunday morning, Dr. Linderman, Gen. Le Grange, and Mr. Crawford, and myself. The Consolidated Virginia is



situated in the heart of Virginia City, not 200 yards from the railway station. Here is a city of about 25,000 inhabitants, ~~two or three years old~~, about 7,000 feet above the level of the sea, with inhabitants in the garb of laborers, but with the habits of Parisians. Here are restaurants as fine as any in the world, though not so extensive as some, nor as elaborate in appointments; here are drinking saloons more gorgeous in appointment than any in San Francisco, Philadelphia, or New York, and here are shops and stores which are dazzling in splendor. The people here seem to run to jewelry. I have never seen finer shops than are here, and the number of diamonds displayed in the windows quite overwhelms one's senses. The club-room is nearly as well furnished as any in New York, except in pictures, books and bronzes, and the manner of living of the inhabitants generally is upon a high scale. No coin less than a quarter of a dollar is used here, and when I offered a dime to the artist who polished my boots he gave me such a look that I would have been proud to exchange places with him and give him the dime to boot. He handed the money back to me, and for fear of making another mistake I gave him a five dollar gold piece, and he gave me the change. I have never been in a place where money is so plenty, nor where it is spent with so much extravagance and recklessness. Every man in the street seems to have his pocketful of gold; one who would pay less than 25 cents for a morning paper would be looked upon as a sneak-thief. The houses are mostly of brick on the business streets, and the sidewalks swarm with people. It is as difficult to get along on C Street in the evening as it is to go along Broadway in the neighborhood of Fulton in the middle of the afternoon. Every young blood in the city, and every old one too, for that matter, has his fast horse or his pair, and although he may be clad in rough attire, you may rest satisfied that his pockets are full of money. I doubt if there is a city of 200,000 people in the United States which has as much wealth as Virginia City. There are some very elegant residences in the city, and there are families like Mr. Fair's and Mr. Mackay's that would grace any station, but taken generally, society in Virginia City is one of the enigmas of life. It should be remembered that several thousands of the population in this city are always under ground. In all the mines there are three shifts of hands. Each shift or detail works eight hours. One shift goes down at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and stays until 10 o'clock at night, when it comes up and another goes down to stay until 6 o'clock the next morning, when that in turn comes up and another goes down and stays until 2 o'clock in the afternoon, and so on day after day, including Sundays.

#### The Descent Into the Mine.

The Consolidated Virginia mine is reached by a main shaft - probably 25 feet by 10. It has no tunnels running to the surface because it is situated on level ground. The shaft, as before stated, is now down a distance of 1,550 feet. Those not accustomed to judge of distances had better stop and make a calculation that will give them some idea of this distance. The shaft is divided into three perpendicular apartments about six feet by four. In these the "cages" run. The cages are simply strongly-built platforms, somewhat smaller than the apartment or tube in which they descend, and are covered by a bonnet of iron for protection from anything falling from above. These cages - why they are called "cages" I cannot imagine - are hoisted and



lowered by means of immense engines and machinery. This machinery - one machine for each cage - turns a wheel or drum upon which a flat wire rope is wound. As this wheel makes its revolutions the cage, to which the other end of the rope is attached, goes up or down, as desired by the engineer. The machines are so perfect in construction that the weight of a finger regulates their speed, and sends the cage whizzing through the shaft or regulates it to a five-minute trip. Each of the three hoisting compartments has three cages, one above another. On these the ore is brought up and the empty cars are sent down. When the shifts of men take place, each of the three hoisting machines brings up 18 men, and when it goes down it takes the same number of fresh hands. It requires two minutes to go up or down in these cages, or just four minutes for the round trip. The cages are not like hotel elevators in any sense. In the first place they are worked by machinery that costs more of itself than ordinary hotels cost; in the next place they go about ten times as fast as hotel elevators; and in the next place they have no sides to them, no places to sit on and no lights; besides they are damp, and, as you get down, very hot and disagreeable with steam. The precision with which they are worked is very remarkable, and I cannot understand how the shaft was made so exactly perpendicular for 1,550 feet that the cages do not strike the sides. Ample provision is made for safety, so that even if the rope breaks, as it did in one of the shafts a short time ago, the cage stops almost instantly.

The first shaft I went down was the Consolidated Virginia. Adjoining the immense building which covers the shaft and in which the machinery is, there is a building used for offices. In the rear is a carpeted room in which there are a bath-tub, half a hundred shoes, as many suits of woolen clothes, similar to bathing suits at the seashore, and about the same number of hats - shockingly bad hats. These suits are for visitors to wear in going into the mine. The terrible heat of the mine and its dampness in places prevents the visitor from wearing any article of ordinary clothing. In such a suit as I have described, I stepped on the cage, a light feeling at the head, and a jumping at the heart. Mr. Mackay, Gen. LeGrange, Ben Holliday, Jr., and the foreman of the mine were my companions. The steam was oozing up around us from the caverns below, the cage shook a little as each one stepped on, the bell struck, the hand of the engineer was upon the lever, and down we dropped! Just above our heads a stout iron bar ran across the top of the cage. As the cage shot down, like a cannon ball falling from a shot-tower, my breath became a thing I was afraid of losing, and I felt a weakness about the legs which did not speak well for my confidence in them. I must confess my head was very light, and that the hand that grasped the bar was the only thing strong about me. Before we could bid good-by to the light of day and the busy world around, we were in darkness black as coal. A sound was heard above like the moving of machinery, and cars filled with ore went rumbling along the iron floor we had left. Steam and heat came up from below, and water dripped upon our heads from above as we shot farther and farther into the earth. Soon the sound above died out, a moment of silence followed, and then the noise of engines and drills and picks came up to us from the bottom of the mine. A moment later, and we felt that the speed was lessening. The warning mark on the rope had told the engineer that the cage was almost down. A second after a little bump was felt, the cage stopped, and we stepped into the mine, 1,500 feet from the surface. Time, two minutes.



### In The Mine.

Here was a commodious station, or chamber, well ventilated and strongly timbered. It reminded me of a railroad station - the cages being the cars, the miners the passengers, the ore and timber the freight. To this station the ore is brought in cars, holding 1,800 pounds. The cars are pushed on to the cage, the bell is rung, and up goes the precious freight. The air at this station was rather warm, but it was so much better than at other points in the mine that it was a positive pleasure to return to it, after going through some of the drifts. In some places the temperature was 130 degrees. If anybody had told me it was 200, I do not think I could have disputed or argued the question. I was rather glad when Gen. Le Grange, in one of the hottest cross-cuts, said that his delicate health would not admit of his going any farther. Of course we could not leave him, and so we all turned back. At the end of some of the drifts, or cross-cuts, the ore, which the miners were digging out with picks, and blasting when it became necessary, was so hot that a person could not rest his head upon it. At one place we followed the drift until we came upon the workmen, drilling and blasting the ore which stopped the way in front. We had reached the end. A tube of compressed air from the surface opened at the point where these miners were at work, and yet the air was so hot that we could scarcely stay five minutes. The miners only stay a few minutes at a time. Fresh ones come in and take the places of the others. It was at this place that I saw the working of a patent drill. A tube of compressed air furnished the motor for the drill, and it worked like a little engine. One man regulated the supply of air and the machinery of the drill, which is so small that a man may carry it on his back. Another does nothing but pour water into the hole that is being drilled. The rock was not very hard, but it was too hard to work with a pick or hand-drill. The machine went to work and put a hole in the rock as though it had been chalk. It took about four minutes to drill a three foot hole, and the drill had to be changed once during the time. Half a dozen holes are thus drilled and loaded, and after everybody is out of the cross-cut they are fired off by means of a cap and giant powder. They open each time a fortune of wealth. The miners then go in with picks and shovels and load the cars with the ore. As each drift advances a track is laid for the cars. After all the ore loosened by the blasts has been taken out other blasts are made, and so mining goes on. Lumber takes the place of ore as fast as the work proceeds.

### Enterprise of Miners.

In going through the mines, miles and miles, which I did, I could not help contrasting them, at the present time, with their condition less than three years ago. The stock was then low in price. A bonanza was then unthought of. A two-compartment shaft was down only 400 feet, and Mr. Mackay informed me that a little donkey-engine, scarcely larger than those used by threshing machine, did the whole hoisting of the mine. A board shed was in the place now occupied by an immense building, and the donkey-engine has given place to a million dollars worth of machinery. When the Consolidated Virginia Company took the work in hand they continued the shaft and enlarged it; they ran drifts north and south, made up raises, sunk winzes, dug cross-cuts in every portion of the ore-vein, and continued until they found the



Big Bonanza. The present machinery and hoisting works are, as I am informed, sufficient to sink and work the mine to the depth of 4,000 feet, including what pumping may be necessary.

My visit to the mine, as stated before, took me to the 1,500 feet level. The first thing wanted on landing was a drink of ice water, which was at hand, and was everywhere through the mines, and the amount a person will drink is amazing. We first went south in the Consolidated Virginia mine, 400 feet, then turning we entered cross-cut No. 4, which we followed 147 feet. Then passing cross-cut No. 3 we entered No. 2, and 324 feet of ore, a wonderful exhibition truly. In every direction we had traversed there was ore and ore. Above our head, under our feet, to our right and to our left it was a continued and continuous body. We could not escape it. Behind us, in front of us, and on each hand; and when we fell in with Dr. Linderman he was half crazy with excitement. He thought it was time to resume specie payments, and was ready to begin at once. A day's experience in the mines under his and Dr. Rogers's instruction makes an expert out of a novice. One comes to know very soon the difference in ores, and can separate the good from the bad without hesitation. He may even be able to tell from the appearance of the chloride and sulphuret ores the amount they will mill to the ton. From No. 2 we went to cross-cut No. 1. They are all 100 feet apart, and cross the vein or body of ore at right angles with its course. No. 1 is the boundary between the

Consolidated Virginia and the California mines. Nearly all the mines belonging to Mackay, Flood and their partners, connect by drifts with the Consolidated Virginia. Three hours were spent in the examination of the two mines named, and although it involved travel which brought excessive fatigue, and although the heat was at times so oppressive that it was difficult to breathe, it was with regret that my face was turned toward the station late in the afternoon. We again took our positions on the cage. The foreman rang the bell which indicated to the engineer, by three strokes, that men were coming up and not ore. One stroke of the bell indicates that the best time possible is to be made; two bells tell the engineer that nobody is upon the cage, and three tell him that the freight is of human kind. So the bell struck three - a little jerk, a sudden start, a fading away of the dimly burning lights, a clinging to the iron rod, darkness, silence, and then, after a pause, a bursting with the rapidity of lightning into light and life again. The clothes we wore were as wet with perspiration as they could have been with water had we bathed in them. It was better than a Turkish bath and no ill effects resulted from the trip to any of us.

#### Market Value of Silver.

Dr. Linderman remarked, after coming out, that he had never seen so much money in his whole life, and never expected to see so much again. He will embody the result of his examination in an official report to Congress, and for this purpose he took samples of ore from every portion of the mines and he will have them assayed at the Carson Mint. Dr. Rogers will embody the result of his examination in a report also. Dr. Linderman thinks the Nevada mines will have a great deal to do with the return to specie payments. He sees no reason why silver should not be in general circulation now instead of small notes and fractional currency, as the low price of silver in the London market makes a greenback dollar by the quotation worth the more by one or two cents. Silver, relatively to gold, has been gradually sinking until it recently reached in the London market the low point of 55½ pence sterling per standard British ounce. The equivalent quotation in New York for the fine bars is 1.21 to 1.22 per standard ounce, which is the lowest point ever reached.