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(254)
Item 45

Location Number: NY 004

Location: Tonopah
Coordinates: 36°03' / 117°15' T3N R42E S35
Elevation: 6030'
Map Sources: USGS Tonopah Quadrangle; Clason 1906; Erickson County Map;
Toiyabe National Forest Map
References: Carlson; Paher; Historic Markers; Mordy; Myrick; Site Investigation
7/11/77
Photographs: URS/Blume Files
Status: Potential National Register Site

Tonopah stretches across a mountain valley on the western edge of the lower San Antonio Mountains, spreading up the lower slopes. To the west is the southwestward extension of Big Smoky Valley, which contains the bed of Lake Tonopah. Clovis spear points, associated with the earliest known population of the North



American continent, have been found on the surface of this dry pluvial lake. The portion of Big Smoky Valley north of Tonopah, between the Toiyabe and Toquima ranges, has many creeks on its western edge. This area was the site of Shoshone encampments; families gathered here in the fall to celebrate the pine-nut harvest with festivals and rabbit hunts. Jedediah Smith, crossing from the west in 1827, was the first explorer to visit the area. He was followed in 1845 by John C. Fremont.

In 1900, James Butler found quartz-bearing silver and within three months had located eight claims in the district. The Mizpah was the richest, producing silver for more than 40 years. These discoveries heralded a new era of mining in Nevada after a 20-year period of depressed activity. A cluster of new districts in central Nevada were soon active, Goldfield and Rhyolite being the most significant.

During the first year of production, \$4 million in ore had been extracted by the use of hand equipment. Early in 1903, the Tonopah Mining Company began extensive development work; by fall, the tent and wood-frame town of Tonopah had enough inhabitants to support 32 saloons, two dance halls, two weekly newspapers, a school, two churches, and two daily stages.

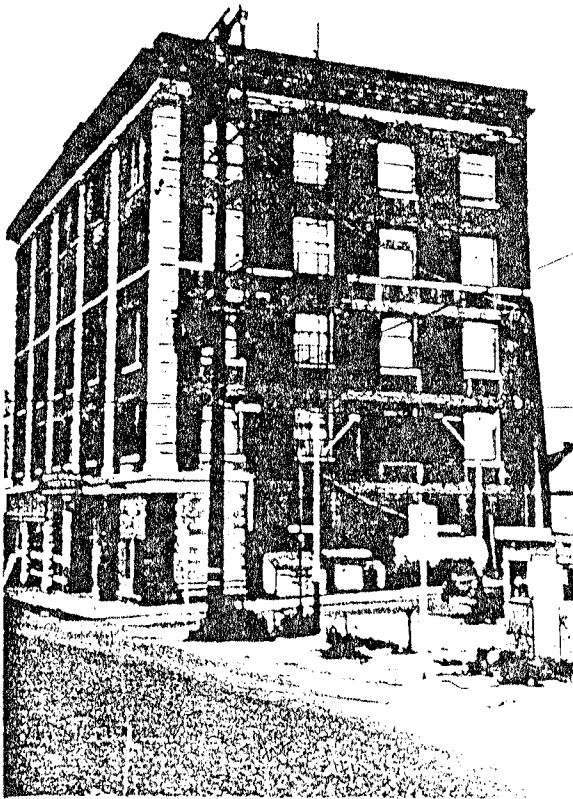
A narrow-gauge railroad completed in 1904 was converted during the next year to standard gauge and connected with Goldfield, becoming the Tonopah and Goldfield Railroad, which operated until 1947. The Las Vegas and Tonopah and the Tonopah and Tidewater railroads served the town less directly. From its beginning, Tonopah had been the outfitting point for prospectors. With the development of Goldfield, Bullfrog, and the other districts discovered during 1902-1907, it served as the distribution and supply center for the new camps. The importance of the district and the town was given official recognition in 1905, when the county seat was moved there from Belmont.

Peak production was attained during 1910-1914, when the average annual yield for the Tonopah Mining Company, the Tonopah-Belmont, and the smaller producers in the district totaled \$8.5 million. The ore was first treated at nearby Millers; later new mill facilities were built, operating day and night. By 1930, annual production had dropped to less than \$1 million, and most of the population had moved on. Tonopah evolved into a community, serving ranchers and the few remaining miners. Many of the town's early buildings have been either razed or modernized, yet many of them, including the Mizpah and Belvada hotels, remain. Various mine and mill ruins also remain from the town's early days.

A portion of the residential area southwest of the center of Tonopah is founded on dense basaltic rock, but other parts of the town rest mostly on volcanic tuff that in some places is strong and competent but in others exists in a loose porous state or has been altered to clay. The clay is easily subject to decomposition and disaggregation when subjected to the action of air and water; this is particularly evident when it is used as a building material.

Of the approximately 900 structures in present-day Tonopah, nearly 70% were built during the first half of the present century, 35% no later than the early 1930s. More than three-fourths are wood-frame buildings of less than three

stories; about half of these are residential buildings. The use of concrete, stone, and masonry is found primarily in residential buildings; there are only three adobe structures, two of them residences and all less than two stories high. Most of the nonresidential buildings are also less than two stories high; exceptions are several hotels that are of three to five stories.



The 5-story Belvada Hotel was constructed in 1905 and remodeled in the late 1960s. It is a wood-frame building 110' x 48' x 70 feet high with an east-west long axis. The structure rests on bedrock; a basement has concrete partitions on which the 6-inch concrete slab foundation of the first floor is placed. One-foot-thick exterior walls of cut stone are veneered with brick set in common bond on both the exterior and interior surfaces. The entrance, on the north elevation, is reached by concrete steps and is flanked by steel-supported columns of cut stone, which are continued at intervals around the north and east elevations. There are wooden double doors, 6' x 7-1/2', with wood framing, on the

north and east elevations. Wood-framed windows about 2-1/2' x 6-1/2' have stone sills. Those in the south elevation are set in the east and west walls of two areaways; the remainder of this elevation has no fenestration. Fenestration on the north and east elevations is 50%; on the south and west, 10%. The parapet walls are topped by a flat roof with entablature. Interior walls are of painted sheetrock on 2" x 4" wood studs; 10-foot ceilings are of painted plaster. The ground floor is tiled; other floors are of wood covered with linoleum. On the lower floor, two stores occupy the front of the structure; in the rear, an empty store has been converted to an apartment. Except for minor hairline cracks in areas of the interior, the structure is in good condition.

North and slightly east of the Belyada Hotel, across the main street, is the brick Mizpah Hotel, also five stories high. Constructed in 1907, the concrete and rock foundation is placed over alluvial sandy loam and includes a basement. The structure is 100' x 91' and has an east-west long axis. Its 60-foot walls reach to

an asphalt-and-gravel-covered wooden deck roof that slopes slightly from east to west. The west and south elevations have a stone veneer exterior at the first story. Windows about 3' x 5-1/2' and 4' x 6' and doors about 8' x 7' and 3-1/2' x 8-1/2' are framed with wood. Fenestration in the north, south, and west elevations is 40%; in the east, 25%. Interior walls are plaster and lath; 8-1/2-foot ceilings are of acoustical tile. The ceramic tile of the ground floor is carpeted; other floors have carpeting over wood. A brick chimney 5 feet wide and 17 inches deep reaches nearly 7 feet above the roof near the center of the west elevation. This structure, too, is in good condition.

