

Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation
Presents



Tailings

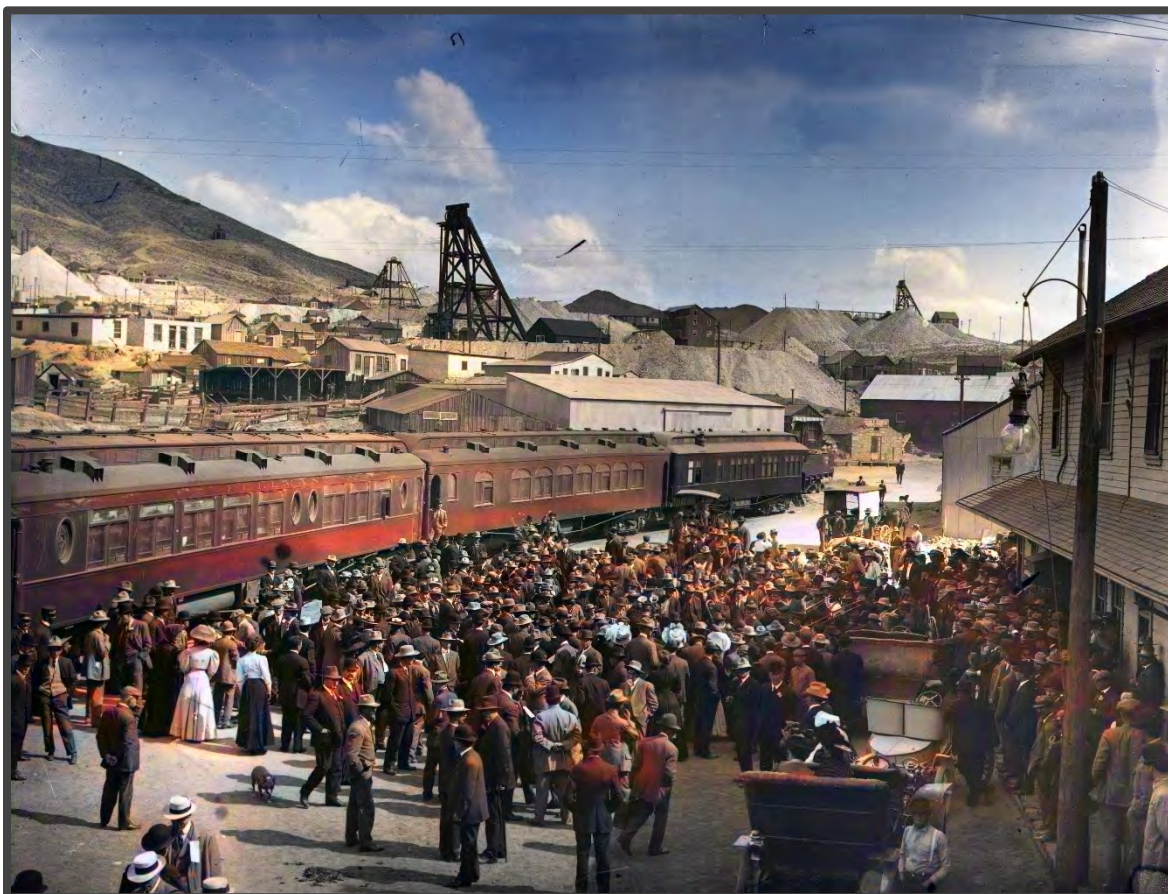
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The Silver Top Rehabilitation Project of 2021 was supported in part by a grant
from the Commission for Cultural Centers and Historic Preservation
Photo by Russ Gartz, Tonopah Historic Mining Park

The Rise of Tonopah, Part 2

By Paul S. Pace, PLS



Band playing at the arrival of a train at the *Tonopah & Goldfield R.R.* depot in Tonopah
University of Nevada Reno, Special Collections Library

Mining methodology in the Tonopah District evolved quickly, replacing the primitive methods used at the outset. In 1902, *Montana Tonopah Mining Company* installed an 80-H.P. steam hoist in place of its small gasoline hoist. Others quickly followed. The *West End Company* ordered heavier machinery to resume sinking its 250-foot shaft.¹ The TMC purchased a 150-H.P. gasoline

engine to operate a compressor and a battery of fifteen pneumatic drills. In May of 1903 the *Mizpah's* steel headframe was completed.

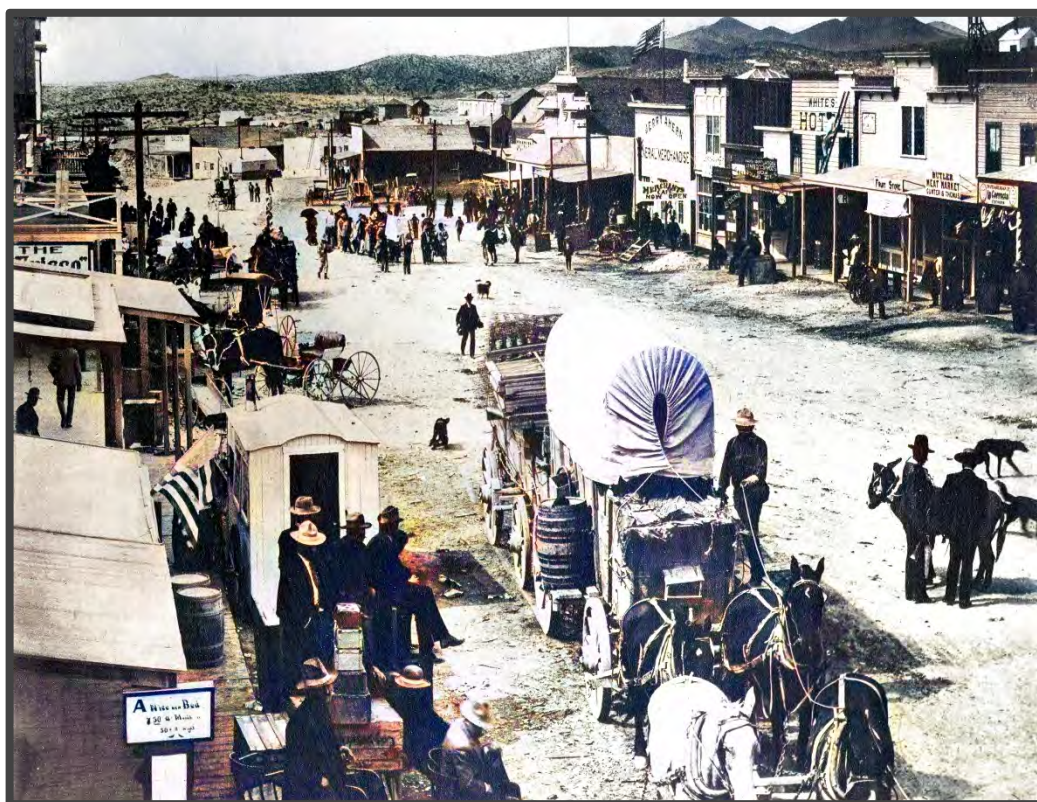
In an effort to reduce the cost of timbering in their wide, steeply dipping stopes, the *Tonopah Belmont Development Company* began using inclined braces instead of square sets.

¹ *The Engineering and Mining Journal*, November 1, 1902

The first mine in the U.S. to do so, the company reported that the triangular braces were stronger in heavy ground and used 10% less timber than conventional square sets.²

The difficulty and expense of freighting machinery and material in-bound and ores out-bound exposed the dire need for a railroad into Tonopah. The nearest existing rail line was the *Carson & Colorado R.R.*, by then a branch of the *Southern Pacific R.R.* A connection could be made at Rhodes, sixty miles distant to the northwest. Toward the end of 1903 officers of the TMC requested and received bids for the proposed railroad. Construction of the narrow-gauge *Tonopah Railroad* south from Rhodes began soon afterward.

The firm of *Oddie and Overbury* contracted for a portion of the grading and the railroad was completed into Tonopah in six months.³ The arrival of the first train in July of 1904 was a significant event for the district, integral to the rise of Tonopah. Nevertheless, the narrow-gauge soon proved inadequate, so the



Erie Street in Tonopah, 1903
University of Nevada Reno, Special Collections Library

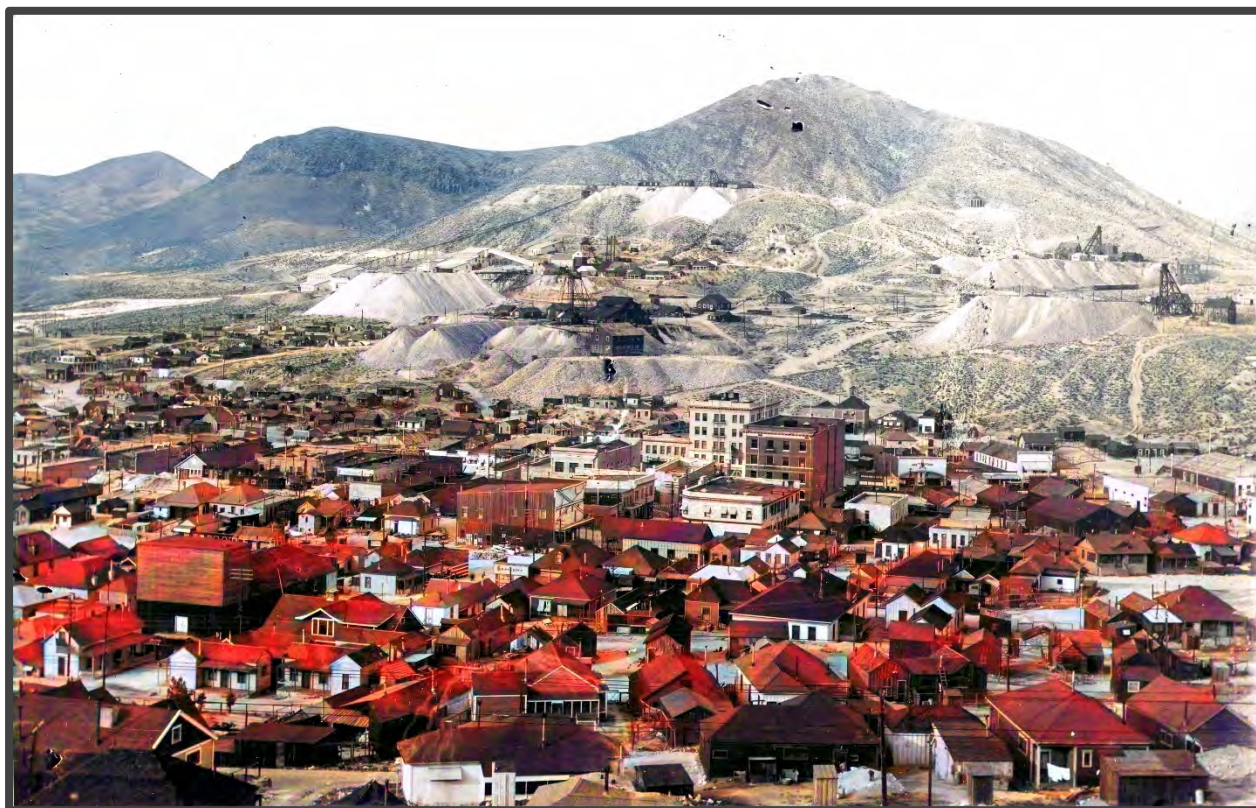
line was broad-gauged back to Mina, some eight miles north of Rhodes.

The completion of the railroad ended plans to use steam traction engines to haul ore from Tonopah to Sodaville, south of Mina on the C. & C. R. R. The railroad's reduced freight charges allowed lower-grade ores to be shipped to smelters in California or Utah. The railroad was yet another sign that in a brief four years Tonopah had evolved from an isolated mining camp to a thriving, modern Western town. The rails were extended to Goldfield in 1905 and the *Tonopah & Goldfield Railroad* was born.⁴ The *Tonopah & Tidewater R.R.* and the *Las Vegas & Tonopah R.R.* soon followed.

² *A History of Tonopah Nevada*, Robert D. McCracken, Nye County Press, 1990

³ Clarence M. Oddie was a lawyer and co-owner of the contracting firm, and Tasker's brother; the firm also contracted for other work around Tonopah, including the water system

⁴ The *Tonopah & Goldfield RR* operated from 1905 to 1947



Bustling Tonopah, Nevada
University of Nevada Reno, Special Collections Library

By 1904, the *Mizpah* was the deepest shaft in the district. The shaft had three compartments, two of them equipped with one-deck hoisting cages, using flat braided ropes and reel hoists. By year's end the shaft was at the 900-foot level with three miles of underground workings. Ore values from the *Mizpah* were running as high as \$300 per ton, with an average of \$60-80, mostly in silver.⁵

In 1905 Butler City was officially renamed Tonopah, though most residents had always called it that.⁶ On May 23rd of that same year, the *San Francisco Call* reported, "Since the discovery of Tonopah in the summer of 1900, the progress of the camp has been gradual, but in every respect highly satisfactory,

and its condition to-day warrants the prediction that it will ere long take rank as the greatest gold and silver mining camp in America...The main street of Tonopah, where five short years ago stood one small linen tent, runs southward for half a mile through town. The sidewalks are concreted and the street is lined with handsome stores and two-story buildings..."

In 1906, the combined total of all ore treated in Tonopah, was 106,491 short tons, yielding an average of \$35.85 in silver, \$12.25 in gold, per ton. But in 1907, the tonnage increased by over 108,000 tons.⁷ The district was now well and truly "on the map". That year the TMC built an enormous 100-stamp cyanide mill and coal-fired power plant at Millers, a

⁵ *Mizpah Mine, Tonopah Nye County Nevada, Historical and Descriptive Data, National Park Service*

⁶ *The History of Fifty Years of Mining in Tonopah, 1900-1950 Nevada Bureau of Mines, Carpenter, 1953*

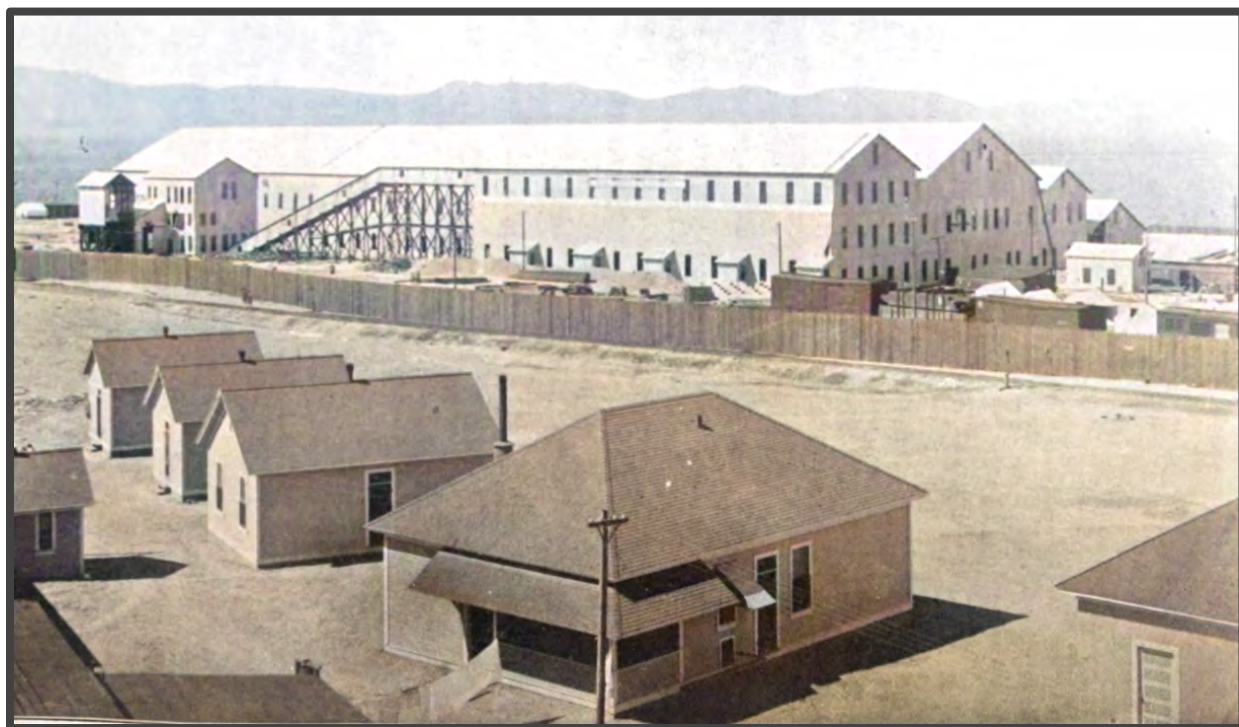
⁷ *Mineral Resources of the United States, Part I, USGS, 1907*

station on the *Tonopah Railroad*.

The region attracted more attention when promoters brought the lightweight championship fight between Joe Gans and Oscar “Battling” Nelson to Goldfield in September of 1906. Thousands watched the bruising 42-round bout. Despite breaking his hand in the 33rd round, Gans bested Nelson throughout the entire fight. Nelson punched Gans

Company, processed 400 tons a day.⁹ During the calendar year of 1907 the mill treated 117,295 tons of ore, and shipped out an additional 23,460 tons. Revenues totaled \$677,912 in gold and \$1,991,141 in silver, despite the short-lived but severe Panic of 1907 which rocked the banks and trust companies and slowed mining all over the west.¹⁰

Soon afterward, a second mill with 60



Extensive mill buildings and company residences at Millers, Nevada
From the *Tonopah Mining Company Annual Report*, 1907

below the belt and was disqualified in the 42nd round.⁸

Meanwhile, Eastern capital poured into the district. The vast new mill at Millers, operated as subsidiary of the *TMC* under the name the *Desert Power and Mill*

stamps was built adjacent to the *TMC*'s facility at Millers to treat ore from the *Belmont Mining and Development Company*. On a hillside above Tonopah, the *Montana-Tonopah Mining Company* built a third such mill.

⁸ Nelson was accused of hitting Gans low to avoid being knocked out.

⁹ About 1905 the T&GRR built an eight-stall roundhouse with a turntable at Millers. It was named for Charles R. Miller, Director of the T&GRR and vice president of the *Tonopah Mining Company*.

¹⁰ The Panic of 1907 was the first world-wide financial crisis of the 20th Century. It turned a growing recession into a financial contraction that was only surpassed by the Great Depression. It ultimately led to the creation of the U.S. Federal Reserve System.



Tonopah's busy main street in 1910.
University of Nevada, Special Collections Library

In 1907 the TMC and the Tonopah Belmont Development Company formed the Esmeralda Power Company to expand the region's electrical system. The firm assumed the contract with the Nevada-California Power Company that brought power from its hydroelectric facilities near Bishop, California to Millers. It also handled the distribution of power into Tonopah. The addition of electric power brought other advancements. Sixty-five-pound air-hammer rock drills were introduced for stoping and raising. Most users reported an average of 50 feet drilled per shift, a large improvement over piston drills of the day. With the advent of hydroelectric power from California, the TMC closed down its coal fired power station at Millers.

All this innovation, together with the

addition of the railroads, abundant water and expanding infrastructure reached critical mass. Tonopah, and its fully industrialized mining district, was elevated into an important regional center in a few short years. Tonopah's 1900-1905 mining boom spawned a second statewide surge of prospecting and mining, just as the Comstock Lode had done, many years before. It led to the establishment of almost one hundred new mining camps around the state and the relocation of the Nye County seat from Belmont to Tonopah in May of 1905. Tonopah's total production from 1902 to 1910 was more than \$38,000,000 in gold and silver, a sum of over \$1,000,000,000 today.

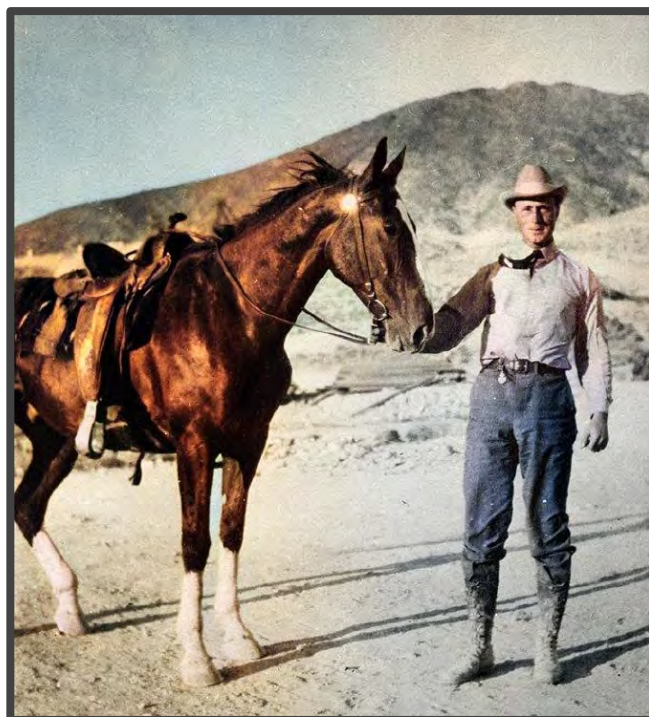
The fortunes of many from Tonopah rose with the town. Jim Butler's friend and partner Tasker Oddie succeeded Butler

as Nye County District Attorney until 1902. Though he suffered great financial losses in the Panic of 1907, Oddie was elected to the Nevada State Senate and later served notably as Governor of Nevada from 1911 until 1915. Oddie was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1921 and served until 1933. He died in 1950 and is buried in Carson City. Key Pittman was elected to the U.S. Senate from Nevada in 1913 and served in the Senate until his death in 1940. He is buried in Reno. Key Pittman's brother Vail became a prominent businessman in Tonopah and in 1942 was elected as Lieutenant Governor of Nevada. He was first appointed as Governor in 1944 and then elected to that office in 1946, serving until 1951. After leaving elected office, Pittman was involved in journalism, banking and civic organizations until his death in 1964. He is buried in Reno.

Pat McCarran became an associate justice on the Nevada Supreme Court and later defeated Tasker Oddie for a seat in the U.S. Senate. Reelected three times, McCarran served in the Senate from 1933 until his death in 1954. He is buried in Reno. Other notable people from Tonopah whose names still resonate today include George A. Bartlett, an influential judge, power broker George Wingfield who became one of Nevada's wealthiest men, Chris Zabriskie, borax magnate and attorney Hugh Brown, founder of the Nevada Bar Association. And what of Jim and Belle Butler? Belle died in June of 1922 and is buried in San Jose, California. Jim survived her by only a few months, passing in January of 1923 at the age of 67. He is buried in Sacramento,

California.

The town of Tonopah survived the high desert, the Panic of 1907 and the cruel mistress of Time. Many smaller or less profitable mines in her district did not. Their claims became open ground again and later led to new discoveries. By 1910, a full-scale mining revival was underway, assuring the town's continued existence. And Nye County experienced a population boom, increasing from 1,140 persons in 1900 to 7,513 by 1910. The State's population also rebounded to nearly 82,000 in 1910, doubling its 1900 count.¹¹ The Silver State once again had a viable mining economy and its fortunes were on the rise. For its part, Tonopah became one of the West's greatest producers of precious metals for decades to come.¹²



Tasker Oddie and his horse, Rounder, in Tonopah, about 1902.
University of Nevada, Reno, Online Collections

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau statistics

¹² *A History of Tonopah Nevada*, Robert D. McCracken, Nye County Press, 1990

Silver Top Trestle Project

Featuring the Photography of Russ Gartz



This summer, the Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation was proud to complete the next step of the Silver Top Rehabilitation Project thanks to a grant from the Nevada Commission on Cultural Centers and Historic Preservation. The project was completed by several groups working together, including the Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation, the Town of Tonopah, the Nevada State Historic

Preservation Office, (SHPO), Robison Engineering, and the remarkable work of Simerson Construction.

Visitors will now be able to better visualize the mining process at the Silver Top Mine. Ore was hauled to the surface via the mine cage to the upper level of the trestle. Miners then hand trammed the mining cars all the way over to the ore house, to dump them against the grizzly



screens on the upper level of the ore house. The larger pieces of ore were rerouted to the sorting tables where the miners would further break them apart sort the ore from the waste. The ore went through spaces in the flooring to the bin below, while the waste was placed inside another mining car. When full, it was taken out the back door and dumped onto the pile. When the pile

reached a certain height, the easily-laid rails were moved to another area to continue dumping the waste.

Once the flat-bottomed ore bin was full, the Tonopah & Goldfield Railroad would position their ore car underneath the chutes and fill the car full of the ore, which was then transported to Millers, located approximately 15 miles west of Tonopah, where the ore was processed at the large mill that the Tonopah Mining Company built there.

A lot of ore was taken out from the underground mines in Tonopah, which made mining in the early days a

physically demanding and dangerous job. Many of those miners' families have visited the Tonopah Historic Mining Park to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors. For those of you who have not yet visited, now is a great time to do so.

To view more of Russ Gartz's photographs, please visit his website at: photographyrussgartz.com



Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation

The Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation, EIN: 88-0464320 is a Nevada corporation for public benefit, exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and organized

exclusively for charitable and educational purposes. Our mission is to preserve Nevada's mining history, heritage, and the life surrounding it at the Tonopah Historic Mining Park. Contributions may be tax deductible

pursuant to the provisions of Section 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 26 U.S.C. § 170(c). For more information, please visit their website at: tonopahminingpark.com

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Tailings Editor

Tailings is created by **Eva La Rue**, Gold Camp Genealogy, Goldfield, Nevada

John Livermore Medallions

The Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation has John Livermore medallions available for sale at the Tonopah Historic Mining Park. Get yours now before they are all gone!

- 2-oz silver \$100
- 2-oz gold overlay \$125
- Single coin case \$7.50
- Double coin case \$10

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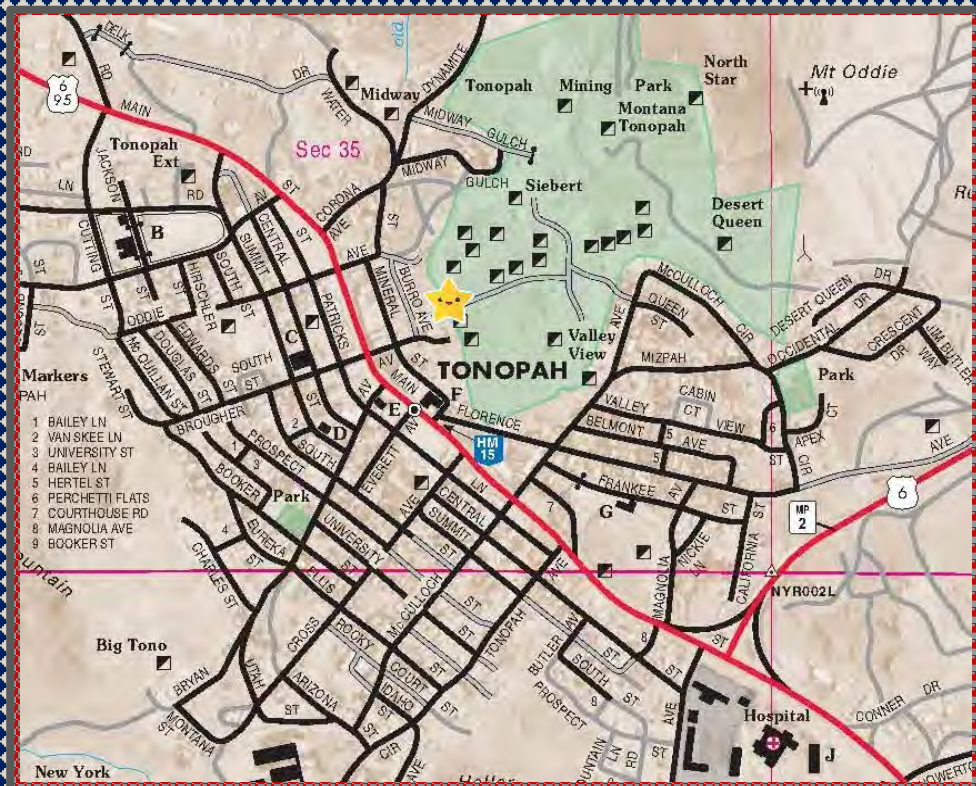
Select “Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation” in the “supporting” area.



Tonopah Historic Mining Park Foundation

PO Box 965

Tonopah, NV 89049



Location of the Tonopah Historic Mining Park, with entrance marked with the star.