



Parked in the Past

Early days at the Orphan Boy

2011 fire not a first; gold production \$583.5 million in today's dollars

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A fire of unknown origin occurred Dec. 23 at the historic Orphan Boy Mine in Mosquito Gulch, according to the Jan. 6 Flume, and that has prompted a look back at the mine's rich history.

A 20-foot-tall ore house, one of three structures that had survived the passing years, was destroyed in the Dec. 23 fire. The structures remaining at the site are a collapsed tool shed and the mine portal.

But that was not the only fire that has been reported at the Orphan Boy.

In October 1907, a bunkhouse burned to the ground. Miners were asleep when it started.

"The bunkhouses on the Orphan Boy mine burned down last week. Miners asleep in the building had to hurry up to get out in their night dresses. Most of them lost their clothing and bedding, and several valuable watches were also among the lost articles," said the Nov. 7, 1907, Flume.

Gold value

About \$7 million in gold was taken from the Orphan Boy over the years it was in operation, a time when gold never exceeded \$20 per ounce, said William Jeffries in a report written in 1990 and stored at the Park County Local History Archives. His great-uncle was James Moynahan, owner and later manager of the Orphan Boy.

Assuming the weight of 350,000 ounces and knowing that the value of gold per ounce as of Jan. 22 of this year was \$1,667.19, the gold taken out of the Orphan Boy in today's dollars would be worth about \$583.5 million. That figure does not include the value of other minerals taken from the Orphan Boy in its 109-year production history.

Buildings

In August 1903, a Flume legal notice said there were several buildings at the Orphan Boy site, including "an engine house with a boiler, air compressor, and other fixtures therein, a blacksmith shop, a boarding house, a bunk house, an

assay office, ore buildings, railroad track and air pipes and other fixtures."

The legal notice advertised a Sheriff's Sale of the Orphan Boy, including 24 other lodes and mining claims, known collectively as the Orphan Boy Hill Consolidated Mining Co.

"It seems that the mine ran out of 'good' ore around the turn of the century and (the mine) was sold in order to satisfy the debts of the company," said an email from Larry Frank, mining historian, former curator of Colorado Springs-based Western Museum of Mining, and former director of Leadville's Healy House Museum.

Sheriff Silas D. Pollock forced the sale on Aug. 31, 1903. The property was sold for \$21,024.94 plus \$7.95 in costs, and was bought by S. Everett Hunter of the Kennebec Mining Co.

The ore house that burned was likely part of the 1903 sheriff's sale.

"The ore house was built in the late 1880s or early 1890s by the Orphan Boy Hill Consolidated Mining Co. on leased land, where they began driving a cross-cut tunnel to access the ore from the Orphan Boy, Senate, Honeycomb, New Years, Evening Star, Copper and Good Samaritan veins," said Frank in the email. "This tunnel cut all of the major veins that had been mined in the early years." The cut went down low on Loveland Mountain adjacent to the railroad, he said.

Beginnings

The Orphan Boy was considered old as early as August 1879; The Flume even then called it "the old Orphan Boy mine."

It was discovered in 1861, as reported in "Park City and Mosquito" - an article in the Aug. 26, 1880, Flume telling of the

area's brief 20-year history. It was one of the first Alma-area gold discoveries.

The mine was staked in 1862 and "it received the first patent number in the Leadville Land District, No. 37. Numbers 1-36 were reserved for the section number in a township," said Frank. The patent date was Jan. 19, 1870.

In the spring of 1862, the town of Sterling had been established to support the growing number of mines in Mosquito Gulch, including the Orphan Boy. By the summer of 1862, there were four stamp mills, 30 houses, three saloons, two stores, and more than one blacksmith shop at Sterling.

In just a few short years, \$3.5 million in gold was taken from the Orphan Boy alone, The Flume reported in the Aug. 26, 1880, edition. The camp was booming.

But the boom was short-lived. In about 1865, the easily worked quartz-based gold began to play out; miners had to dig deeper, the gold was harder to get to, and there was less gold to the ton. The deeper they dug, the more galena they found. Galena is the natural form of lead and often contains significant amounts of silver. In later years, silver, copper and zinc were mined from the Orphan Boy, but in 1865 the appearance of galena "was considered a loss to the miner," as reported in The Flume's "Park City and Mosquito" article.

Also in 1865, the Indian Wars started, and because supplies were hauled across the Great Plains, freight charges increased considerably. The government recruited men to fight the war, others went "back to the states," (see Flume, Aug. 26, 1880) and of the remaining miners, most went to new gold fields in Montana. The mines caved in and filled up, and in the years before 1879, the

name of Sterling was forgotten. There were only a dozen miners left working claims in Mosquito Gulch.

Silver Mining, Mosquito and Park City

The Leadville silver boom started about 1878, and the Mosquito Pass toll road was built during 1878 and 1879 to give a direct route to Leadville. Its completion in July 1879 brought in some settlers, who took up claims in Mosquito Gulch. "The miners found plenty of indications of silver in the vicinity of the old mines," said the Aug. 26, 1880, Flume.

The deserted site of Sterling was christened Mosquito, and the town site was reestablished. Some settlers moved into the old homes; others built new. In 1879, new businesses in the town of Mosquito included a store, a restaurant, a hotel and a blacksmith shop.

Also in 1879, Henry J. Bagley, formerly of Denver, built a store east of Mosquito that carried a full line of goods to supply the mining camp. He also built a house for himself, his wife, Marg, and their two children - Henry, 10, and Joseph, 3.

Michael Pyne built a hotel, and the structures together "formed the nucleus around which is built the town of Park (City)," (Flume Aug. 26, 1880).

There were 106 people counted in the 1880 census living in Park City and Mosquito Gulch combined. Within a short time, the town boasted three hotels, a market, a mining exchange office and 25 homes. Bagley also ran the post office, carried the mail back and forth to Alma, and was co-owner with Frank Howe of the land on which Park City was built.

In The Flume of April 28, 1881, it was reported the Orphan Boy and War Eagle (later named Senator) lodes had produced \$500,000 in silver in four years

of mining. A specimen assay that year showed 250 ounces of gold and 3,000 ounces of silver per ton.

Long-worked mine

The Orphan Boy was worked, off and on, beginning in 1861.

Through the years, the mine had problems and had to shut down occasionally for reasons such as water in the tunnels, litigation, and management changes.

"The last that the mine was worked was when the mine dump was being re-worked for the remaining gold values. I believe that was in the 1970s," said Frank.

Orphan Boy owner

The story of the Orphan Boy would not be complete without a short biography of its owner and manager, James Moynahan.

Moynahan owned the Orphan Boy until the sheriff's sale in August 1903. He continued to manage the property after that sale.

According to the "Portrait and Biographical Record of Denver, Colorado and Vicinity of 1898," Moynahan was a civil war veteran with the 27th Michigan Infantry, fought at Vicksburg and Knoxville under General Ambrose Burnside, and mustered out of the war as a captain.

In Park County politics, he served as county commissioner from 1870 to 1873. In 1876 and again in 1882, he was elected to the state senate, representing Park and Fremont counties. For two years, he was president pro tem of the senate, meaning he would act as governor if both the governor and lieutenant governor were out of state or unable to serve.

He was elected mayor of Alma in 1896, 1897 and 1898. He helped in incorporating the town of Alma, was a member of the first board of trustees, and assisted in laying out the town grid.

He was married to Mary Monaghan. They had four children - Alice, Ambrose Edwin, James W. and Clarissa.

See next page for images.



1880s mosquito gulch

A photo of a town in Mosquito Gulch in the 1880s, possibly Mosquito or Park City, shows rocky terrain in the foreground and mountains as a backdrop. The Orphan Boy mine was near this site. (Photo courtesy Park County Local History Archives, T.C. Miller photo, Credit: Ed & Nancy Bathke Collection)



Time to fish

The current runs strong in this photo of fishermen in Mosquito Gulch circa 1880s. (Photo courtesy of the Park County Local History Archives, T.C. Miller photo, Credit: Ed & Nancy Bathke Collection)



James Moynahan

This undated photo shows James Moynahan on a hunting trip. He was a Colorado state senator, Alma mayor and owner of the Orphan Boy mine in the late 1800s. (Photo courtesy of Park County Local History Archives, source: South Park Historical Foundation)

Orphan boy ore house



The ore house at the Orphan Boy Mine, as it looked in the winter of 1985, shows off quite a view. The ore house was built in the late 1880s or early 1890s, and it was destroyed by fire on Dec. 23, 2011. (Photo courtesy of Larry Frank)