

New Mexico Mining History

a series of articles in News Nuggets
By Jerry Simmons - Historian

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Pre-Spanish Native American period

Jan90 News Nuggets

Starting next month, I will be putting an article in our bulletin dealing with New Mexico's mining history. I will cover various regions of the state; so if you happen to have or know of someone who has some good historical information, please let me know. Also, I would like Xerox copies of any old mining documents (New Mexico) to use in these articles.

Feb90 News Nuggets

Any attempt to discuss the past history of mining in New Mexico must start with the Pre-Spanish Native American period. Anyone who has done much walking or has lived in New Mexico very long has had the joy of discovering agate, jasper, or obsidian arrow points. And not too rare is the finding of a piece of turquoise that is out of place as to its surroundings. These, as well as other items, are indicators of past ages and peoples who extracted and worked stony material not only for practical uses but for pleasure as well. Those of us who have found these artifacts of antiquity have often wondered where the ancient artisans got their material.

Also, we may have come across old pits in the cliff or hill that have the markings of man's work. Often we are not aware of the great amount of metal and precious stone extraction work that was done by the Native Americans because of the antiquity of the site and the manner of mining. A classic example of this is in the turquoise field to the north of Cerrillos, N.M. It is not uncommon to run across a shallow pit with rocks in it and find pottery fragments and/or broken stone implements nearby. By putting two and two together, one suddenly realizes he or she has just come across an ancient mine. The Cerrillos area is just one of many examples. There are at least five other areas within 40-80 miles of Cerrillos. These are:

1. Iron mining to the east and southeast of Golden, N.M. - probably for red color for paints.
2. Obsidian mining in the Jemez - used for tools
3. Azurite/malachite mining at La Madera on the east slope of the Sandias - used for paints
4. Salt mining southeast of Estancia - used for seasoning foods and trading
5. Clay mining southeast of Cerrillos - used for making earthenware

Early historical records tell that in 1535 Cabeza de Vaca was given a copper rattle, silver, and antimony. He was told of copper deposits to the northwest of present day Las Cruces. This was probably a reference to copper in the Santa Rita area.

From Farmington to Silver City to Roswell to Raton, there is a vast amount of evidence that mining is nothing new to New Mexico. The native Americans of antiquity were fascinated by the natural beauty of the rocks and minerals they came across. And besides the practical uses for the material, some of them may have had a private

cache (collection) of pretties that they enjoyed showing their friends. Who knows? Maybe the first Albuquerque gem and mineral show was in 1000 A.D.!

"The Spanish Period"

Mar90 News Nuggets

No one is sure as to the exact date that minerals (mostly ore) began to be shipped to Mexico for smelting. The earliest record of metals and ore being transported from the New Mexico area south to Mexico is 1581. From this time until roughly 1800, precious metals and other mineral values were moved south on a steady basis.

The following dates are a few of the more noteworthy ones that show the Spanish mining activity in this state:

1581 - Rodriguez - Chamuscado expedition noted various metals and ores including a "copperish steel-like metal" from the Cerrillos area and salt from Estancia, apparently first minerals mentioned in situ.

1583 - Don Antonio Espejo and Fray Bernardino Beltran visited deposits on the Pecos River, then known as Rio de las Vacas; along the Rio Grande; and in the Cerrillos-Ortiz Mountains area.

1590 - Gaspar Castano de Sosa allegedly had assays made of ores from Cerrillos area.

1595-1602 - Vincente de Zaldivar Mendoza described discovery of "mines" at "San Mateo" and "Anunciacion" and told of working them with his servants and household. The description given in the Zaldivar inquiry in 1602 says the mines of the Anunciacion were near a huge salt deposit.

1598 - Don Juan de Onate noted deposits of sulfur and "alum" at Jemez Springs, and salt at Estancia and near Zuni.

1600 - Onate and his party celebrated "a great mining discovery" and began extracting silver, according to a letter from his brother, Luis Nunez Perez.

1604 - Azurite and a green mineral, probably malachite, reported in the Jemez country by Onate.

1621-26 - Padre Salmeron noted "rich mines" (prospects) near Cia, Sandia, and Acoma.

1629 - Salmeron noted alum, copperas, garnet, lodestone, salt, sulfur, and turquoise; also ores of silver, copper, and lead.

1630 - Prosperous "mines" noted at Socorro by Fray Alonzo Benavides. Also reported deposits of alum, garnet, salt, turquoise, and ores of silver and lead.

This concludes the first section on Spanish mining exploits in New Mexico. Next month we will finish the Spanish Period. So until next month, Hasta La Vista!

*All dates with historical notes were taken from notes by Stuart Northrop.

"The Spanish Period" -- Part II

Apr90 News Nuggets

The final segment of our Spanish Period in New Mexico's mining history reveals that mining was a slowly development industry. The Pueblo Revolt of 1680, and subsequent ill feelings, hampered greatly the mineral exploration for the next 30-50 years. And later, Spanish interest would be only on the part of individual families.

1655 - Goodfortune Creek in Sierra County was being mined by Marguerito Lucero, a Spanish explorer. Dr. C. F. Blackington reopened the mine many years later and called it the Goodfortune mine.

1660 - Salt was being sent from Estancia salt lakes to Chihuahua silver mines, 700 miles distant.

1680 - Pueblo Indian revolt drove Spaniards from New Mexico and mining was stopped for several years. The use of Indians in mining is generally credited as being part of the cause of the uprising. Ortiz mine, in Old Placers district, reported to be in operation.

1685 - First mining claim recognized by historians: Pedro de Abalos claim in Fra Cristobal Mountains.

1692 - Reconquest of New Mexico by Governor don Diego de Vargas.

1697 - Vetancurt noted copper, gypsum (selenite), jet, lodestone, salt, turquoise; vein ores of lead and silver near Cerrillos.

1700 - Spaniards returning to New Mexico were prohibited from engaging in mining. Indians were recovering copper in Central region of Grant County.

1713 - A mine in Rio Arriba County was registered.

1717 - A grant of a lead mine was made in Cerrillos district.

1722 - Gold was being mined at Mina de la Tierra, Cerrillos district.

1744 - The mine, Nuestra Senora del Pilar de Zaragoza, was registered by Don Magrinan of Santa Fe. Some mining was conducted in 1744 in southwestern New Mexico, largely by prospectors from the south.

1748 - Villasenor reported a few unprofitable and abandoned mines near Albuquerque.

1751-1800 - Occasional mention of mineral wealth but New Mexico industries were agriculture, stock raising, and barter.

1800 - Santa Rita and Santa Clara (Pino Altos) copper mines opened.

In concluding the Spanish Period, it is important to note that Spanish involvement in mining here in New Mexico was minor, compared to that in Mexico. Distance from Mexico City, climate, persistent strife between Native Americans and Spanish, and lack of easily accessible mineral wealth were the major contributing factors. It would not be until 1800 that major continuous mining would become a part of this vast area we call New Mexico.

"The Santa Fe Trail Period"

May90 News Nuggets

As the Spanish Period in New Mexico's mining history passed the year 1800, rapid and permanent changes took place which would forever change the industry of mining. Historical events occurring outside of New Mexico's history will be included due to their influence upon mining in New Mexico. The reader should note how fast things began to develop in regard to mining, and note the date 1822.

1803-1804 - Santa Rita development commences. Central district worked by Europeans.

1807 - Pike reports copper, gold, muscovite, and salt.

1822 - Santa Fe Trail established.

1824 - Spring caravan over Santa Fe Trail brought \$30,000 in goods to New Mexico and traders returned with \$180,000 in gold and silver and \$10,000 worth of furs.

1826 - Placer gold found in Rio Hondo district.

1828 - Old Placers (Ortiz) discovered by a shepherd in Santa Fe County. Accredited by some historians as first gold mining in New Mexico after the Pueblo Revolt of 1680. It took 3 months for the news to reach Missouri, 800 miles away.

1835 - Anthracite mined at Madrid for local use.

1839 - Placer gold discovered at New Placers in San Pedro Mountains.

1840 - Longfellow mine was worked in Bernalillo County.

1843 - Nugget weighing 7 pounds taken from New Placers. Santa Ana closed the Santa Fe Trail in this year. 1843-45 - Troubles with the Texans.

1844 - Santa Fe Trail reopened. Major copper production starts from Central area, Grant County. Gregg describes gold, gypsum (selenite), petrified wood, salt, and ores of copper, lead, iron, silver, and zinc. Deputy Costanares from California reported to Mexican Congress that gold placers existed 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles.

The year 1822 marked one of the greatest events that would alter the history of New Mexico and the entire Southwest. The next 50 years would see the establishment of mining as a major economic industry in all the Southwest. The word that gold had been found in California (1849) would see thousands of immigrants and fortune seekers make the trip on the Santa Fe trail to Santa Fe en route to California. Many of these travelers would seek their fortunes in New Mexico; others would venture on to California, only to return to New Mexico later.

The Santa Fe Trail Period - part II

Jun90 News Nuggets

From the beginning there stood a town at the end of the trail which was more than two centuries old - Santa Fe. A small village huddled around a dirt plaza that boasted of having been a Spanish "royal city" as the capital of the kingdom of New Mexico long before there was a Los Angeles California or a Chihuahua in northern Mexico. Santa Fe's historical fame and geographical position made it a center into which flowed commercial, military, mining, and adventuresome folks. The opening of the Chihuahuan silver mines in northern Mexico encouraged trade to the south. By looking at the chart of trade over the Santa Fe trail from 1822-1843 it is easy to see that by 1843 most of the merchandise coming from eastern states was going to Chihuahua. As early as 1821 a busy wagon-laden commerce began with an American trading party under Wm. Becknell. This party set wheels on the trail to Santa Fe in September of 1821. Six months later some of the party returned with rawhide pouches of Spanish silver coins. Becknell's party had taken \$3,000 worth of trade goods and returned with a 2,000 percent profit. From 1821 until 1879 Santa Fe became the clearing house between the Chihuahua mines and the "States back east." It is no wonder La Fonda on the plaza became known as the "Exchange Hotel."

In 1848 gold was discovered in California. The Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty ceded New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah and Parts of Colorado and Wyoming to the U.S. J.S. Hutchason staked a claim in the Ortiz district and later discovered the Magdalena district in Socorro county.

1849 - Gold mined in the newly acquired states was worth three times the price paid for them. Stageline from Missouri to Santa Fe established. First known mining in the San Andres and Organ mountains.

1850 - New Mexico became a Territory of the U.S. Placer gold found in Lincoln county.

1854 - Lordsburg ;district opened.

1858- Ore was being shipped from the Hanover mines.

1860 - Pino Altos and Nogal districts discovered. Pinos Altos was the third significant discovery of gold in the state.

1861 - Civil War began. Confederate invasion suspended mining. Carthage coal mined by Ft. Craig troops.

1863 - New Mexico's first major silver discovery in the north Magdalena district.

1865 - Mining resumed on a large scale in several areas of the state.

Next month's issue will bring us to the height of the precious metal mining in New Mexico and the coming of the "IRON HORSE".

Until then don't forget to look for those Spanish pieces of silver; there are bound to be some waiting to be picked up somewhere on one of your adventures. I know --- I found one!

"The Iron Horse and Precious Metals Period"

Jun90 News Nuggets

Once the trail from the eastern states was open and passenger safety relatively sure, the logical step forward was the coming of the "Iron Horse." The first piece of railroad track laid in New Mexico was on November 30, 1878. From 1879-1882 all major railroads within the state were constructed. During this same time practically all precious and base-metal producing districts were discovered and developed.

1866 - Rich placers found at Elizabethtown, Moreno Valley, Colfax County. Lead-silver ores at Magdalena, Socorro County. Silver ores at Georgetown (Mimbres district), Grant County. Quartz lode found in Nogal district, Lincoln County. Copper discovered near Fort Union.

1867 - Bullion from Graphic and Juanita mines in Socorro County hauled by wagons over the Santa Fe Trail to St. Louis. First stamp mills in New Mexico at Pinos Altos and at Ortiz mines.

1868 - Water Canyon and Ladron districts in Socorro County discovered "Big Ditch" started, 41 miles long, (1868-1869) from Red River to Elizabethtown. Aztec lode said to be richest discovery in West, in Baldy district, Colfax County. First lode claims made in Nogal district. A smelter was operated a short time at Red River.

1870 - Silver at Chloride Flat near Silver City. Lordsburg district prospected and first claim filed.

1872 - Prospecting in Hansonburg area. Operations stopped at Ralston (Shakespeare) for lack of machinery. Georgetown silver lodes were being worked. "Ruby district" in Rio Arriba County showed some activity.

1875 - Mogollon and Steins Pass districts prospected. High-grade copper-silver ore discovered at Mogollon (Cooney, Alma, Glenwood), but was closed in 1880 by Indian raids, and reopened in 1905. Eureka district discovered.

1877 - Rich placers and gold-bearing quartz veins near Hillsboro, in Las Animas district.

1878 - Silver ore discovered at Lake Valley, Sierra County, with Bridal Chamber one of the richest lodes of silver in the world. Prehistoric turquoise workings found near Hachita, Eureka district. First railroad track laid in New Mexico, Nov. 30.

1879 - Santa Fe Railroad reached Las Vegas. Ore discovered in Cerrillos district of Santa Fe County and Macho district of Sierra County. Smelter built at Red River. Gold, copper, and zinc found in Sierra Cuchillo prospect region, Socorro and Sierra Counties. Ore deposits in Hermosa district discovered. A

lode being worked at foot of Baxter Mountain, Lincoln County, was first lode discovery made in White Oaks district. Prospecting in Jarilla Hills, Otero County, but no real mining until 1899. Ore discovered in Chloride district in Sierra County by Henry Pye. Modoc located. Wilcox prospect region discovered south of Mogollon. Orogrande district being prospected. New developments at Hillsboro, Ft. Stanton, Sandia Mountains, Manzano Mountains, Los Cerrillos, Taos, and Moreno districts.

1880 - Steeple Rock district, Grant County, discovered; Placer gold at Hachita. Prospectors swarm into Chloride district, Sierra County. Red Bandana group discovered at Elizabethtown. Silver discovered at Kingston, Sierra County. White Oaks town staked out in 1880. General U.S. Grant visited New Placers district. Fremont district discovered. Tierra Blanca, Bromide No. 1 district, Sierra County; and the Pecos, Willow Creek, Tererro, Cowles, Cooper, and Valley Ranch districts discovered in San Miguel County. Southern Pacific Railroad reached Lordsburg. Socorro Peak district scene of much activity in the 80's. Gallup coal being used by railroads and smelters.

1881 - A smelter was built at Socorro (closed in 1893). Graphic smelter was built in 1896 at Magdalena. Lead in Caballo Mountains. Council Rock and Cuchillo Negro districts opened. Stamp mill erected at Santa Rita. Nearly 3,000 locations made in Socorro County in 6 months.

1882 - New Mexico Mining Association organized.

1883 - Gold Camp prospected. Nambe, San Pedro, New Placers were producing. Rich silver strike at Kingston. Pecos mine at Tererro in San Miguel County discovered. Deming and Pacific Railroad completed to Silver City. Smelters were in operation in Socorro, Deming, Santa Rita, San Jose, Silver City, Shakespeare, San Pedro, Paschal.

1885 - Earliest list of mining districts made showed Grant had 21, Socorro 13, Sierra 10, Taos 6, Lincoln 6, Bernalillo 6, San Miguel 6, Dona Ana 4, Santa Fe 2, Valencia 2, Colfax 1, and Mora 1. Silver price dropped from \$1.07 an ounce to below \$0.60 in late 1880's.

1888 - Coal mines operating in Gallup area and Cerrillos district.

1891 - Cyanide process perfected in South Africa and gold mining was revolutionized. Systematic iron mining began in Fierro-Hanover district. Railroad built to Hanover mine.

1893 - Boom at Amizette, Rio Hondo Twining district, Taos County. Silver demonetized, followed by a panic. Prospectors turned from silver to gold. Black Hawk, Lake Valley, and other silver-producing districts shut down. Some prospecting at Red River. Billings smelter was shut down at Socorro.

1894 - Rush to Questa district, Taos County. Production started at Bland, Cochiti district, Sandoval County. Telephones installed at Santa Fe.

Tom Schmierer came across the following White Oaks news that had been published in The Scotland Journal (South Dakota) on March 16, 1895.

San Antonio, N.M. Special: The stage from White Oaks to Carthage, twelve miles from here, brings additional news of the disaster at the Old Abe Mine. When the stage left White Oak, it was certain eight men had lost their lives. The only one escaping being one who was close to the shaft's mouth when the fire broke out. Already, six bodies have been recovered. Three bodies were recovered in the main way between the second and third levels. The other two bodies are believed to be in the sixth level.

White Oak is over sixty miles from Carthage, the nearest railroad point and the nearest telegraph line is at this place. The origin of the fire is still unknown. The Old Abe Mine is a gold property that has been worked for a number of years and is wonderfully rich. Almost from the grass roots, it paid handsomely and the company's stock cannot be bought at any price.

Your Historian has had many adventures in collecting memorabilia from town belonging to this time period in New Mexico. I will bring some of them to the July 23 Meeting.

"The Base Metals and World War I Period"

Aug90 News Nuggets

Last month we covered the period of history in which the precious metals gold and silver played the major role in the development of New Mexico's mining industry, as well as territorial economy. This month's article covers the years 1900-1920 in which the base metals zinc, lead and copper played the major role in the state's mining. 1914 would see the First World War, and thereby stimulate the discovery and recovery of the base metals for use during the war. From this time on the USA would become the guardian of world peace. The industrialization of mining would revolutionize mining here in New Mexico and the entire Southwest.

1900 - Jones Camp district iron deposits discovered in Socorro County. Low-grade copper found in Burro Mountains. Zinc production developed at Kelly and Magdalena in Socorro County. Thomas Edison erected a plant at Dolores to extract ore using static electricity which failed because dry gravels could not be obtained.

1901 - First gold discovery of importance in Sierra Caballo region, Sierra and Dona Ana counties. Gold and silver at San Lorenzo (Lemitar) area of Socorro County. Gold dredge operated in Moreno valley. Bland and Albemarle thriving gold camps in Bernalillo (now Sandoval) County with ores being treated at Albemarle mill. Other mining camps in Bernalillo County were Hell Canyon, Coyote Canyon, Las Placitas, San Isidro, Copper City, Algodones. Sulfur was being produced near Jemez Springs. Placers were active in Rio Chama area. Socorro smelter was sold to American Smelting and Refining Company and dismantled. Bureau of Immigration reports "79 official mining districts and 754 patented claims in the Territory" but explained there were 300 districts and 1,000 claims not patented.

1903 - Importance of gold-mining industry (Cochiti district) resulted in splitting off of Sandoval County from Bernalillo County. Gold rush to Hillsboro. Leaching plant built near mill on Gilal River, Telegraph district, but silver ore body was exhausted and plant abandoned in 1905. High-grade zinc ores associated with lead ores found in Magdalena.

1904 - The Tularosa (Bent) district in Otero County was created and development began. Magdalena was leading in zinc production and held this rank until 1920. Two smelters operating in Silver City. Copper deposits reported in Scholle-Raygo area.

1906 - Sampling of great copper deposit at Santa Rita started which was to result in open-pit mining of low-grade ores and development of Chino as one of the nation's major copper mines. Daily automobile service from Torrance to Roswell and Silver City to adjoining camps, and Albuquerque to Estancia Valley.

1909 - First oil discovery in southeast at Dayton. California district in southwest Grant County (now Hidalgo County) organized. Vanadium discovered in Palomas Gap area. Small plant built at Cutter to treat vanadium ores, but soon closed down. Test wells for oil in Pecos Valley, near Artesia.

1910 - Chino Company begins open-pit operations at Santa Rita. Lead ore shipments were made from Tijeras Canyon district to Joplin, Missouri.

1911 - Rush of activity as oil is discovered in Seven Lakes area of McKinley County.

1912 - New Mexico admitted to the Union. Magdalena Mountains Manganese district, Socorro County, discovered. Steam-shovel mining started at Chino Copper. 1912-1920: Considerable activity in Elizabethtown area.

1914 - World War I began. Sanford and Stone cited 70 minerals available in New Mexico.

1916 - Metal mining stimulated by war, prospered 1916-1918. All-time high record of silver produced. True nature of molybdenum veins at Questa, Taos County, recognized. Previously molybdenum was mistaken for graphite and the yellow molybdic ochre (ferri-molybdite) for sulphur.

1918 - World War I ended. Prospectors looking for gold found tin in Taylor Creek area of Socorro-Catron counties. Mrs. A. A. Leach identified two uranium-bearing minerals, torbernite and Autunite, in New Mexico.

1919 - Oxides of uranium and vanadium recognized in Cochiti area. Molybdenum production started on a small scale at Questa.

1920- Red River district became second-largest producer of molybdenum in U.S. Potash was identified at Carlsbad, foretelling, birth of a new industry in New Mexico which began operations 11 years later. La Bajada Copper Company developed a mine in the La Bajada area. Pastura district, Guadalupe County, developed in 1920's. Gas discovered at Aztec.

Next month, we will talk about another type of gold, commonly called black gold or oil. Until then remember never to get so busy that you don't have time to smell the flowers or pick up a pretty rock!!!

1920-1945

Sept90 News Nuggets

The easily found valuable minerals that once lay undisturbed as float had all been recovered and the subsequent major ore deposits mined by the 1920's. The advance of technology, from the automobile to the atomic bomb, would open the door to new needs for different minerals. The primary focus would become fuels and steel production. New Mexico had a good share of the necessary raw products for these i.e. coal, oil, natural gas, uranium, magnesium, molybdenum, beryllium, etc. This time period in our State's mining history saw a great expansion in the exploration and extraction of these fossil fuels and ores. Precious metal mining moved more slowly and centered around the extraction of copper and gold.

1920 - Gas discovered at Aztec.

1921 - Gas discovered at Ute Dome.

1923 - Gas found in Grayburg Formation at Artesia.

1924 - Southeastern New Mexico becomes largest oil-producing area of State. State Land Office receives first oil royalty check. Oil discovered at Artesia and at Bloomfield.

1925 - Minerals not heretofore recorded in U.S. were first found in Carlsbad potash field. List includes apthitalite, kainite, kieserite, Langbeinite, leonite, lueneburgite, and polyhalite. Operations suspended in Mogollon district. Gas at Barker Creek and oil at Table Mesa.

1927 Willow Creek mine ranked as largest individual producer of lead, gold and silver in State and maintained that rank for 13 years.

1928 - Groundhog mine, Central area, Grant County, discloses large body of complex ore. Hobbs-San Andres oil pool discovered. Another depression retards mining.

1929 - Artesia oil area extended.

1931 - Mogollon district resumed operations after 1925 shutdown. Fierro iron mine suspended operations. U.S. Potash started production near Carlsbad, the first mining of potash in the U.S.

1932 - Price of copper declined to less than five cents per pound. Oil and gas industry firmly established in New Mexico. Major oil pipelines extended into State's oil-producing areas.

1933 - Price of gold raised to \$34.95 per ounce. Potash Company of America started production near Carlsbad.

1938 - New Mexico ranked 13th in 48 States in total value of mineral products. All-time high in value of gold produced, \$1,506,750.

1940 - Union Potash and chemical Co. starts production at Carlsbad. Hobbs booms with discovery of oil. Queen oil discovery at Caprock. Refinery completed at Prewitt.

1941 - U.S. enters World War II. Nearly all metal mines in State active.

1942 - Gold order stops production of gold. 1942-1945 was a period of great expansion in New Mexico mining. Luis Lopez district active, 1942-1945, as an important source of manganese. Extensive exploration for strategic and critical minerals; among these were tin, beryllium, tungsten, iron, manganese, mica, fluorite. First self-sustaining chain-reacting uranium pile was completed and operated at the University of Chicago. Mogollon shut down after substantial period of operation since 1931. Camp Bobcat in Hidalgo County discovered as possible manganese, zinc, and molybdenum area. Oil production boom.

1943 - More than 82 percent of potash produced in U.S. came from New Mexico.

1944 - Beryl being shipped from the State. Three hundred-ton fluorspar mill was completed in Gila. USBM explored Capitan region, Lincoln County; and continued exploration in 1947-1948.

1945 - July 16, first atomic bomb exploded at Trinity Site. War Production Board lifted ban on bold mining and all lands containing minerals were withdrawn from sale. New era of uranium prospecting opened for New Mexico.

We started this period of mining history with gas and ended it with a boom. New Mexico's mining, military and general industry would change drastically within the decade to follow. President Woodrow Wilson was soon to write a letter (1947) commissioning the organization and building of Sandia National Lab. Next month, the postwar expansion period.

1946-1966 -- The Uranium Boom

Oct90 News Nuggets

One major correction is in order here concerning last month's article: It was not Woodrow Wilson, but Harry Truman who commissioned the establishment of Sandia Labs in 1947.

As the demand rose for fuels for our machines, the oil/gas industry expanded greatly in New Mexico from 1946 to 1966. While the precious metal prices fluctuated up and down, uranium prices climbed to record highs. Income to the State as a result of oil, gas and uranium took New Mexico to 12th in the U.S. in mineral production, 7th in oil production and 1st in potash production.

1946 - Uranium is discovered near Grants.

1947 - Oil and gas discovered near Bloomfield.

1949 - Oil and gas pools found near Lindrith.

1950 - Haystack Mountain uranium discovery near Grants.

1952 - New Mexico ranks 1st in potash production, 2nd in beryl, 3d in copper and manganese ore and 4th in fluorite and molybdenum.

1954 - Jackpile Mine is said to be the largest uranium mine in the U.S.

1955 - Fluorite production ceases due to flood of imports. Sheet mica production (Petaca) doubled. Beryl and iron production increased.

1956 - New Mexico's mineral output reaches a record \$513 million. Uranium reserves estimated at 41 million tons (2/3 of national total). A sixth company enters the potash field in southeastern N.M.

1957 - Metal prices decline; potash and oil prices continue to increase. El Paso Natural Gas constructs the 7,200 barrel-a-day oil refinery east of Gallup. Construction of the Ideal Cement Plant in Tijeras begins. Perlite from northern N.M. is largest area of perlite in U.S. Uranium development in the Ambrosia Lake area is at full scale. Moly Corp. expanding their work at the Questa Mine near Taos.

1958 - Business recession - mineral industry feels the effects.

1959 - Construction materials become of primary interest. Gypsum plant construction between Santa Fe and Albuquerque started. Copper strike cripples the copper industry, but most New Mexico copper pits continue operation.

1960 - Copper industry labor strikes settle. Coal mining goes to strip mining as the Four Corners Power Plant is approved. Ideal Cement Plant finished 1st year of operation.

1961 - Construction on Four Corners Power Plant is started. New Mexico's production of uranium and perlite is 1st in U.S.

1963 - New Mexico's mineral output reaches \$686.8 million. Coal and helium production increase. N.M. is 3rd in copper production.

1964 - Barite is mined, crushed and bagged in Socorro County for shipment to markets in the State and used mostly for heavy drilling mud in oil well exploration. Rise in lead-zinc prices causes a renewed interest in old prospects and mines.

1965 - Uranium and copper are major metals being mined, while zinc rises to 3rd in output value. A. B. Baca of Socorro reopens the Kelly Mine and produces zinc-lead ores for shipment to the Hanover Mill.

1966 - Moly Corp. mine-mill complete. Coal mining in northwestern N.M. produces 10 million tons of coal.

Next month's article will be the 10th and final one on New Mexico's mining history. It is hoped by your historian that you have enjoyed them. Until next time -

1970s and 1980s

Nov90 News Nuggets

During the 1960's New Mexico experienced great growth in its mining of fossil fuels (oil, natural gas and coal) and uranium. Copper continued to be mined at a steady rate, as did molybdenum at the Moly Corp facilities near Questa.

The 1970's were to see fluctuation in most areas of New Mexico's mining. The change in value of various metals was the major contributing factor to these fluctuations. The late 70's would see the highest price ever for the precious metals, and just as sudden as the rise in prices, so was the droop. Small fortunes were gained and lost in the stock market in a matter of months. Gas steadily was becoming the number one product mined in New

Mexico as more fields were opened in both the southeast and northwest parts of the state. Uranium had a sudden downward swing from which it has never recovered to this day.

The 1980's saw the near extinction of uranium mining. Molybdenum mines at Questa slowed down their production, and by the late 80's Moly Corp's production in New Mexico was minimal. Copper prices were at their highest ever. Copper mining in the entire southwest has escalated since the copper prices went up.

The operation of Goldfield Ltd. in the Ortiz Mountains brought some income to the state from gold recovered by the alkali leaching process. This was to come to an end by the late 1980's. Some fairly large nuggets of gold were recovered in the San Pedro Mountains and sent scores of people to the area in search of the golden metal. The Hansonburg District, always a favorite among collectors, saw a revival as members of the Albuquerque Gem and Mineral Club, as well as others, picked up the claims and kept it open for surface collecting on a fee basis. Oil and gas exploration continued throughout the state. The Waste Isolation Pilot Project (WIPP) in salt beds near Carlsbad was begun. Nearly ready to accept nuclear waste, the project has sparked seemingly endless debate which is still not totally resolved.

Overall, the trend in mining in New Mexico has diverged into commercial interests such as oil, gas, coal and precious metals, and the quest for mineral specimens. Increasingly in New Mexico, and for that matter throughout the U.S., individuals have been picking up the claims of old mining districts and reopening their mines. More specimens like those from earlier times are showing up as they come to the surface. With increasing restrictions being put on mining and those who hold claims, as well as the closing of vast areas of once public land, it is nice to see those old claims at least producing specimens, and in some cases open for a fee to those who enjoy collecting. Don't hesitate to make your voice heard when your state's mineral areas are threatened to be closed.

Enjoy the minerals, take care of the land, ask permission and always be careful - do these and very few times will you not go home blessed!