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Introduction

Santa Rita no longer exists. It is not even a ghost town. Locals know it as the “town in space.” During the course of the twentieth century, mining companies literally dug up the ground beneath the copper camp. First named El Cobre, or “Copper,” by the Spanish for the vast outcroppings of raw native copper, the mining community from its inception centered its activities on digging up the rich, nearly pure nuggets of the red metal in the heart of the Apache

homeland *Apachería* (see figure 0.1). First the Spanish and then the Mexicans struggled to create an enduring settlement known after 1804 as Santa Rita del Cobre. Violent resistance to their efforts by the Apaches threatened their ability to export the valuable ores and establish a viable camp. By the time the first group of Americans arrived in the 1820s at the locale, the Apaches had already forced three evacuations of the coveted copper mines. Still, the desire for the precious red metal persisted despite financial and diplomatic failures well into the American period after the Mexican-American War. Even after the frontier Americans forced the subjugation of the Apaches to reservations by the 1880s, the town now known as Santa Rita seemed unlikely to be a permanent community. Investors Matthew Hayes, J. P. Whitney, the George

Hearst estate, and the Rockefeller Syndicate, among others, failed to make a successful go of it in the lode-mining era. Like frontier capitalists all over the American West, they grappled with the exigencies of a very isolated spot, limited access to freighting, dwindling ore values, and recalcitrant oxides, among other difficulties.

Large corporate investment in the mines ironically saved the town at least until 1970. In the end, though, Santa Rita succumbed to the successful implementation of massive economies-of-scale mining in the porphyry era—that of open-pit mining of very low-grade ores. One hundred years ago, open-pit mining crews initiated a sixty-year assault on the landscape that led to the demise of the town. Still, from 1910, when the Chino Copper Company began the pit, until 1970, when its successor

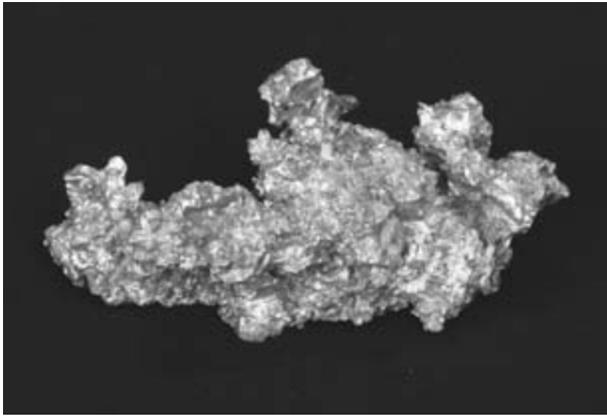


FIGURE 0.1. *This native copper nugget shows the lustrous nature of the raw deposits first discovered thousands of years ago by the Mimbres peoples. “Growing” out of the foothills below an escarpment later named Ben Moore Mountain, the shiny red metal lured successive waves of miners from New Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Mining today still occasionally uncovers this wondrous rich mineral so coveted in modern society.*

COURTESY OF TERRY HUMBLE.

the Kennecott Copper Corporation removed the last of Santa Rita’s homes, a distinctive community thrived. New technologies and creative engineering strategies ensured returns on the millions of dollars in investments for the remainder of the town’s life. This temporary though extraordinary mining community is the focus of this narrative and photographic history.

This story will introduce the reader to various distinctive themes in mining history. The first two themes are the implementation of frontier mining technology and the conflicts between Euro peoples and Native Americans that came about as a result. The Spanish had scoped out the Sierra del Cobre Virgen (or Virgin Copper Mountains) as early as the 1750s. Not until 1799, however, did they begin claiming and developing mines under Lieutenant Colonel José Manuel Carrasco and the laws of the Spanish Crown. Once these invading Europeans made their way to the coveted raw copper outcroppings as well as some short-lived gold prospects, they employed mining techniques they had inherited from other ventures in Peru and Mexico. This flourish of activity frightened the native peoples, who soon made a concerted effort to remove the intruders. The contact between the Spanish and the Apaches led to a legacy of conflict inherited in 1821 by the Mexicans; violent exchanges led to killings on both sides. The Americans inherited

this unfortunate tradition first apparent in 1837 with the Johnson massacre, which motivated the native peoples to forcefully keep the invaders out of their homeland for the next twenty years. The great Chiricahua chief Mangas Coloradas hoped to destroy this legacy as well until his untimely murder in 1863 by US troops. Hence, the application of mining technologies by frontier Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans forced a nearly century-long conflict with the Native Americans. These two themes dominate the story in the first two chapters.

A third major theme of this volume is the history of the community itself. Although abandoned at times, Santa Rita evolved from a mining-military camp with no more than a few hundred inhabitants, many of whom were forced there against their will, for the first forty or so years into a Victorian Mexican town of about 2,000 by the end of the nineteenth century. Like so many frontier mining inhabitants in New Spain and then the American West, the miners and their families needed protection from the area’s natives to carry out their mining endeavors. Hence, Santa Rita, although known as a mining camp administered under Spanish then Mexican law, earned the title of presidio as well. Presidio status afforded the inhabitants enough protection so that they could grow gardens, raise sheep and cattle, and, therefore, build a small community. Prior to the forced evacuation in 1838, the successive mine claimants brought in priests to perform the various religious and civil functions the people so desired as well as soldiers to ensure that mining itself could be carried on. From its beginnings, however, Santa Rita was a closed community. Prior to the American takeover, most of the inhabitants were prisoners who either volunteered or were forced to work the *minas de cobre*. And if they decided to leave, they risked being subjected to capture or a worse fate at the hands of the Apaches, who felt increasingly threatened as the century wore on. Spanish and Mexican authorities punished deserters severely as well if they turned up elsewhere.

This closed-community status remained intact into the twentieth century, when the Chino Copper Company established a company town. In that isolated copper camp, the corporation enticed workers with certain amenities and then constricted them and their families. They lived according to a strict policy of segregation by ethnicity. Mexicans and Mexican Americans lived in “East” Santa Rita and the Anglos in Santa Rita, divided by a valley just east of the “Devil’s backbone.” Company

law enforcers also kept out union organizers whom company officials called “agitators.” Until the post–World War II period, company management limited the inhabitants’ movements, restricted Hispanics’ occupational advancements, coerced them into buying company store products, and literally limited their freedoms in this isolated corner of New Mexico. Despite these limitations, though, the community developed rich family, educational, religious, and social traditions greatly influenced by the Mexican and American cultures. Despite the imposition of welfare capitalism and corporate paternalism, the inhabitants eventually gained freedom from company rule in the post–World War II period. The main impetus for these changes came with the efforts of the local unions, especially the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (Mine Mill). Under principally Chicano leadership, occupational and social justice became more possible as a result. The evolution of Santa Rita in the twentieth century from company town to independent community before its ultimate demise in 1970 is shared in chapter 4 and in parts of chapter 5.

By the 1880s, Santa Rita exhibited many of the characteristics of most mining camps in the American West in the late nineteenth century. A fourth theme reveals that the copper town experienced a kind of lawlessness that characterized life in most mining camps in the West. Although not as violent and lawless or as male-dominated demographically as many frontier mining towns, Santa Rita witnessed a “wild” period when various corporate investors fell victim to and then perpetrated scams either to make illegitimate claims to the mines or to swindle others for a profit. The famed Santa Rita Mining Association, largely sponsored by the corrupt Santa Fe ring, instigated in the 1860s one of the most notorious efforts to illegally confiscate the valuable ore deposits. This duplicitous attempt to expropriate the richest claims led to a lengthy legal battle won by the Spanish heirs who benefited from the provisions of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the laws of territorial New Mexico. In the 1880s, Boston financier J. P. Whitney attempted to sell the foundering copper mines for \$6 million to investors too wise to fall for the trap. In another frontier legal confrontation, the Santa Rita Mining Company, a Rockefeller Syndicate enterprise, tried to “steal” the Pinder/Slip claim from local investors. The result was a lengthy legal and community squabble inherited in 1909 by the Chino Copper Company. This

frontier legacy of claim-jumping and contentious litigation places Santa Rita right at the heart of traditional mining history in the late nineteenth-century American West and is covered in chapter 3.

Two additional major themes center on corporate mining and big labor. Like so many mining ventures in the American West, the “Chino enterprise,” as famed engineer-historian Thomas A. Rickard called it in the 1920s, blossomed when eastern investors incorporated the Chino Copper Company in 1909. Persistent Boston investor Albert C. Burrage and New York financial giant Hayden, Stone & Company worked out a deal that offered the fiscal backing and engineering know-how to start the open-pit operations. Mining engineer John M. Sully, in fact, proved to the money men, with his successive reports on the New Mexico property from 1906 to 1909, that the economies-of-scale strategy of mass mining would reap tens of millions of dollars in profits. And once Daniel C. Jackling signed on, Santa Rita’s fate was sealed. Jackling had already engineered the formation of the world’s soon-to-be-largest open pit, the Bingham Canyon Mine near Salt Lake City, Utah. Sully’s suggestion that the new copper company implement massive steam-driven shovels to dig the blasted low-grade porphyry ores resonated with Jackling, who first used this strategy in 1906 for the Utah Copper Company. Jackling’s endorsement of Sully’s propositions and then his willingness to serve as Chino’s chairman of the executive committee of the board of directors convinced the investors to go forward with the colossal project. The story of the birth of the Chino Copper Company is covered in chapter 3.

The Chino enterprise proved so successful that it soon became the target of other mining corporations. Profits of nearly \$10 million in 1917 alone attracted the attention of the Guggenheims. Already well established in the smelting industry with their American Smelting & Refining Company, the Guggenheims decided to invest in major copper-mining properties as well, first in Chile and then in the United States. To consolidate their multinational properties the Guggenheims incorporated the Kennecott Copper Corporation in 1915, then began acquiring stock in the Utah Copper Company. By the mid-1920s the syndicate controlled the Utah venture, continued to develop the Chuquicamata and El Teniente mines in Chile, and had established two additional mining corporations, Ray Consolidated (Arizona) and Nevada Consolidated. In 1924 and 1926, successively, these two

latter outfits purchased the Chino operations, which included the open pit, crushers, and a concentrator. In 1932–1933 the Guggenheims consolidated all four properties—Bingham Canyon, Ray, Nevada, and Chino—under one corporate entity, the Kennecott Copper Corporation.

Kennecott would soon become the top copper corporation in the world. The Bingham Canyon Mine ranked first internationally, and Chino as high as fourth. Kennecott consolidated all four properties in the American West into the Western Mining Division. The corporation's successful domination of the industry translated into exponential profits and reinvestment in each of these mining ventures. After Kennecott acquired Chino in 1933, for example, it soon invested nearly \$10 million to upgrade the worn-out and obsolete technologies with newer, more efficient, and larger-scale machinery and equipment. The copper company also constructed a smelter at Chino Mines in the mill town of Hurley just nine miles south of Santa Rita. This rejuvenation program set the pattern for regular upgrading of technologies at the New Mexico enterprise, which included the laying of more than fifty miles of rail lines, the transition from coal power to electricity, the use of the latest drilling and blasting technologies, and the introduction of massive haul trucks, precipitation processes, and innovative smelting techniques. The results were phenomenal. Shovel and haul crews removed tens of millions of tons of ore and waste rock annually, creating the mammoth stairstep benches of the gigantic open pit. Mill men calculated the best strategies to process the ores into concentrates, and smelter men devised new methods to produce increasingly purer copper. By the 1940s, production soared annually to 140 million pounds, rarely dropping below this figure for the remainder of the century.

As early as the 1930s, Santa Rita's fate was apparent to company executives, engineers, and the workers. The steady persistence of the mine operations ate away the ground of Santa Rita. The company began removing homes and then planned for future mine expansion with a clear understanding that the town would eventually disappear. By the 1950s the use of giant haul trucks of 25- to 40-ton capacities expedited the digging of the pit and, simultaneously, the removal of the bedrock foundation of the copper town. Kennecott decided in 1955 to sell the company-owned homes and other buildings to an Ohio real estate firm, initiating the final evacuation over

the course of the next fifteen years. Engineering strategies and implementation of massive technologies, such as 85- and 150-ton Lectra Haul trucks, meant that Santa Rita's demise was inevitable. The story of Kennecott's implementation of modern technologies and the consequences for Santa Rita is told in chapter 5.

Another key theme of this volume centers on big labor. For the first forty-two years of the twentieth century the successive corporations blocked unionization at Chino. Corporate hegemony over the workers predominated. John Sully, general manager from 1909 until his death in 1933, crushed all unionization efforts at the New Mexico enterprise in cooperation with his management team, as well as head of security Jim Blair. In 1912, for example, every shovel runner who "sat" on the job in protest of his wages was fired and his name was sent to copper companies throughout the American West. The same fate met a group of men in 1923 after they protested wages and other conditions. After Kennecott acquired the Chino property in 1933, Jackling shut down the operations soon after learning the workers had voted to become certified in the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers. New general manager Rone B. Tempest, in fact, compiled a blacklist of nearly seventy employees who "instigated" unionization. The workers, especially unjustly treated Hispanic "laborers" (a euphemism for Chicano employees), hoped to establish a collective bargaining unit. They believed Mine Mill would assist them in eliminating the dual labor system, the unfair limitations in lines of promotion, unequal pay compared to other divisions in the company, discrimination in the wage scale and occupational advancements, and other traditional injustices perpetrated by company officials. Only after the intervention of the National Labor Relations Board, mainly from 1938 to 1942, and then the US Supreme Court's decision in 1942 to favor union certification did Kennecott have to recognize and begin bargaining with Mine Mill and numerous other unions. The certification crisis is examined in chapter 3. Legal protections and labor activism combined to break down corporate hegemony over workers on a nationwide basis. Chino's story is a microcosm of that transformation in the second half of the twentieth century.

The rise of big labor after World War II brought about steady changes for workers at Chino. The results were astonishing, in terms of both work-related and larger societal reforms. Clearly, Mine Mill and the other

unions made gains that altered Kennecott's unfettered domination over the workers at Chino and elsewhere in the American West. Under the leadership of Clinton Jencks, beginning in 1947 Amalgamated Local 890 became the standard-bearer for worker initiatives and demands from this time forward. With his wife, Virginia, "El Palomino," as he was called, vigorously worked to train Chicano labor leaders to fight for their rights at work *and* in the broader community. Albert Muñoz, Joe T. Morales, Juan Chacón, and others soon trusted Jencks. They all worked together to formulate a grassroots labor movement that blossomed beginning in the late 1940s. They learned about the historic injustices against workers in the United States and cleverly placed themselves in that context to fight for their rightful claims to better wages, safer working conditions, greater fairness in promotions, and fringe benefits, such as health insurance and retirement packages. At the same time, leaders like these men and others, such as Art Flores and Cipriano Montoya, inserted broader societal initiatives into their labor strategies. They introduced the rank and file, for example, to political candidates like Henry Wallace in 1948 for president of the United States and David Cargo in the 1960s for governor of New Mexico.

Jencks, Muñoz, Morales, and others also gallantly fought anti-labor and anti-communist efforts of the US Congress to limit unionization and collective bargaining gains. Mine Mill officials of the international office and of Local 890, for example, confronted the unjust anti-communist affidavit provision of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. Local 890's first strike in 1948 against Kennecott, in fact, reflected the union's willingness to risk punitive measures by the corporation and threats to its collective bargaining status in opposition to the affidavits, which the US Supreme Court in 1965 finally declared unconstitutional. Local 890's valiant struggle against this unjust law, which also supported the right-to-work doctrine and limited the union's access to National Labor Relations Board arbitration, reflects the civil rights component of the labor movement in post-World War II Grant County. That struggle also included Mine Mill's expulsion from the Congress of Industrial Organizations in 1950 as well as repeated attempts by the United Steel Workers of America (USWA) to raid Mine Mill jurisdictions. Local 890 officials soon realized the need for cross-union cooperation, initiating the formation of the Chino Unity Council in the mid-1950s to unite the industrial and

craft unions. The results often translated into wage increases and other benefits for Mine Mill as well as the Metals Trade Council locals (e.g., the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen of Local 902, the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen of Local 323, and the International Association of Machinists of Local 1563).

These efforts reveal a kind of labor militancy in Grant County not witnessed in the 1950s and later elsewhere in the copper industry. Among the extraordinary achievements of Local 890, after its successes at Kennecott in the late 1940s, was the legendary Salt of the Earth strike of 1950–1952. Targeting the Empire Zinc Company's treatment of its workers, Local 890, whose Chicano leadership worked principally for Chino Mines, won fame in the radical syndicalist movement for its willingness to stand up to multimillion-dollar corporations, as well as government officials, during the height of the Red Scare in the mid-twentieth century. The banned (as communist) and "notorious" *Salt of the Earth* film, starring Local 890 president Juan Chacón as well as labor leader Joe T. Morales, among other locals, still today represents the workers' struggles for occupational as well as societal justice.

Local 890 continued its efforts for labor reforms in the 1950s and 1960s. Numerous strike actions forced Kennecott to more fully address the demands and grievances of the workers. Although Chacón, Severiano "Chano" Merino, and other labor leaders always remained vigilant in fighting for equality at Chino, Kennecott's workers witnessed a dramatic change in their rights on the job and in the wider southwestern community. Chino Mines general manager Frank Woodruff, in fact, came to realize by the 1960s that big labor had made a distinctive mark in labor-management relations. He and officials from corporate headquarters had no choice but to recognize their demands. Even after Mine Mill merged in 1967 into the USWA, the grassroots efforts of Local 890 continued to influence Kennecott's decision-making process concerning its workers. This remarkable success story resulted in Mine Mill and its successor, the USWA, cooperating with Kennecott to set the pattern for the best labor contracts in the copper industry. In essence, Kennecott executives accepted Mine Mill's argument that workers deserved a larger portion of the profits through good wages, formalized grievance procedures, safer working conditions, some of the best health and retirement benefits in all the smokestack

industries, tuition support for college students in the county, bonuses for suggestions to improve operations, and other paybacks for service to the company. Labor compromised the traditional corporate hegemony over the workers, and in the end the evolution of labor-management relations facilitated the formulation of an interestingly affluent society. Both Chicano and Anglo workers now had access to the American dream of owning a home, having jobs for generations, and gaining access to the full rights of citizenship. With a standard of living unmatched in New Mexico, Santa Rita and others of Grant County evolved from a working-class to a working, middle-class community. Labor's role in formulating the new work environment and countywide affluence is examined in chapter 5.

Finally, the reader should be reminded of the environmental costs of mining for two centuries in New Mexico's most prolific and famous mineral district. This theme, peppered throughout this story, has left a legacy that locals cannot ignore. Poor management of resources brought on nature's fury. Floods, for example, inundated the area in the 1890s and early 1900s from the erosion caused by overcutting timber and piling waste and ore dumps in the surrounding mountain ranges. Chino did stave off major flooding and water scarcity problems through its water conservation program. On the other hand, the massive transformation of the landscape throughout the open-pit era in the twentieth century graphically illustrates how mining has affected the local terrain, its human and animal inhabitants, and groundwater sources. The industrial processes of mining, milling, and smelting also left their marks, creating toxic water and air pollution problems. The battle between Kennecott and its workers in the 1970s and later against government officials and grassroots environmentalists attempting to force the copper corporation (and its successors Phelps Dodge and Freeport-McMoRan, in particular) to comply with air and water pollution regulations forewarned of another threat to industrial hegemony similar to the labor movement. In that confrontation Kennecott and its successors eventually realized the societal as well as fiscal benefits of cleaning up their mess, even though recalcitrant at times in formulating a more earth-friendly strategy. Air pollution problems, of course, eventually disappeared with the demolition of the smelter. Water pollution issues remain, es-

pecially in light of the gargantuan needs of the modern operations for this scarce natural resource in the Desert Southwest. Corporate investment in water conservation and cleanup, combined with governmental and environmentalist watch-dogging, has resulted in changes. Whether the current owners will continue to comply with state and federal regulations remains to be seen. Regardless, like the evolution of the labor movement, which required corporate understanding and sympathy for the employees and resulted in changes in workers' conditions, the environmental movement must be taken more seriously for the mining operations to continue to function less toxically in the early twenty-first century.

When Harrison Schmitt, Gilbert Moore, and Ted Arrellano founded the Society for People Born in Space in the mid-1970s to memorialize the former Santa Rita as "space," the parameters for the town's history had been set. It began as a Spanish mining outpost in 1803 and, although at times abandoned, lasted as a community until 1970. This narrative offers deep insight into Santa Rita's mining and communal pasts through words and photographs. We hope the combination of the two gives a complete picture of an exceptional place with a very interesting history.

The visual markers of that place are clear. The Kneeling Nun still sits above the gargantuan 1.5-mile-wide and 1,500-foot-deep pit to remind locals of mining's past and present as well as the Hispanic culture that sustained most of the inhabitants of the former town. The pit itself symbolizes mining life in terms of the profound achievements of modern engineering and technological know-how and provides a stark example of human manipulation of nature. The thousands of visitors who stop at the historical wayside just off Highway 180 on the north rim of the mine learn how the pit was formed and a bit of the history going back to when an Apache man first introduced Carrasco to the rich native copper deposits. They also see the mountain-size waste and leach dumps that can be seen for nearly 100 miles on a clear day in the Southwest. This volume is an attempt to document the mining processes that formulated this scene as well as to remember the people who were responsible for this result. In the end, although Santa Rita no longer exists and is now relegated to a space above the pit, the town's story now has a space in mining and community history.