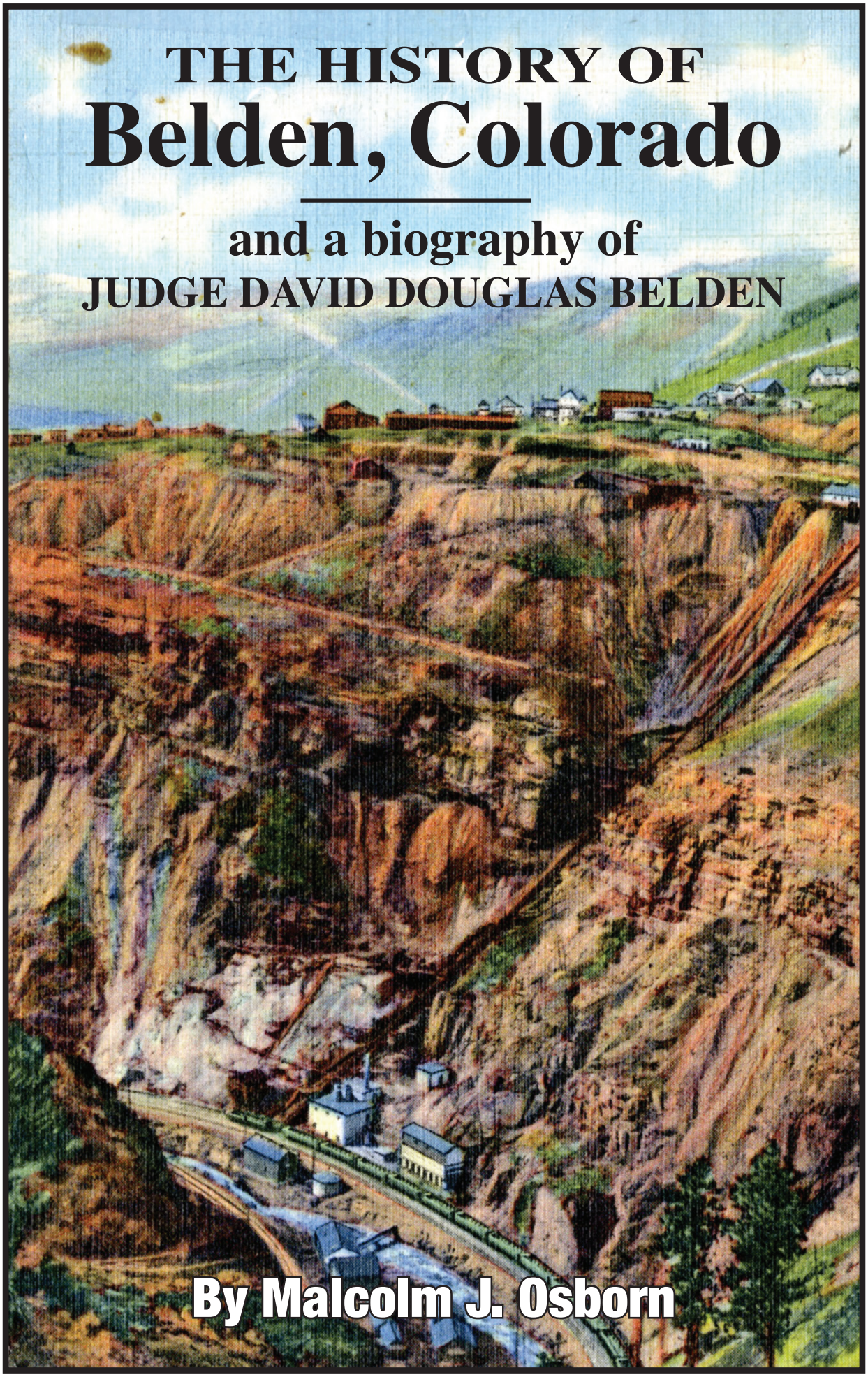
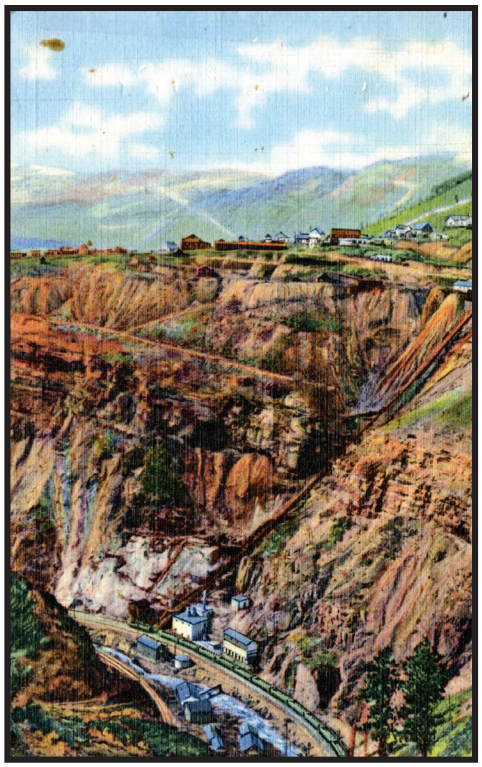
THE HISTORY OF
Belden, Colorado

and a biography of
JUDGE DAVID DOUGLAS BELDEN



By Malcolm J. Osborn



Belden and Gilman in roughly 1930.
Courtesy of the Eagle County Historical Society

The History of Belden, Colorado and a Biography of Judge David Douglas Belden

by Malcolm J. Osborn
and the Eagle County Historical Society

1st Printing 2025

Published by the Eagle County Historical Society
(eaglecountyhistoricalsociety.com)

Printed by Gran Farnum Printing, Glenwood Springs, CO

FUNDED BY THE CHARLEY PETERSEN RESEARCH FUND

Introduction

BELDEN, COLORADO is not a name that means anything to most people. Even those who have lived just miles away from it for their entire lives don't know it exists. It's labeled on just a few maps made lifetimes ago and it's only seen by the men who manage it and a select few visitors. By every measure, Belden is a forgotten place and unfortunately so.

Most residents of the Eagle Valley are quite familiar with the sight of the abandoned town of Gilman and its looming empty buildings along Highway 24 between Minturn and Red Cliff. Some even know the story of its past—the enormous Eagle Mine, the thriving company town, its inevitable demise, and the environmental trainwreck that followed. However, a literal stone's throw from Gilman lies Belden, completely out of sight and equally out of mind.

(c. 2016) Belden as seen today looking Northwest / *Placesthatwere.com*

A few hundred feet below Gilman at the base of the precipitous cliffs of Battle Mountain sits the abandoned site of Belden, Colorado. It lies directly next to the Eagle River and is positioned in such a way that it is impossible to see from Highway 24, effectively making it invisible. Even

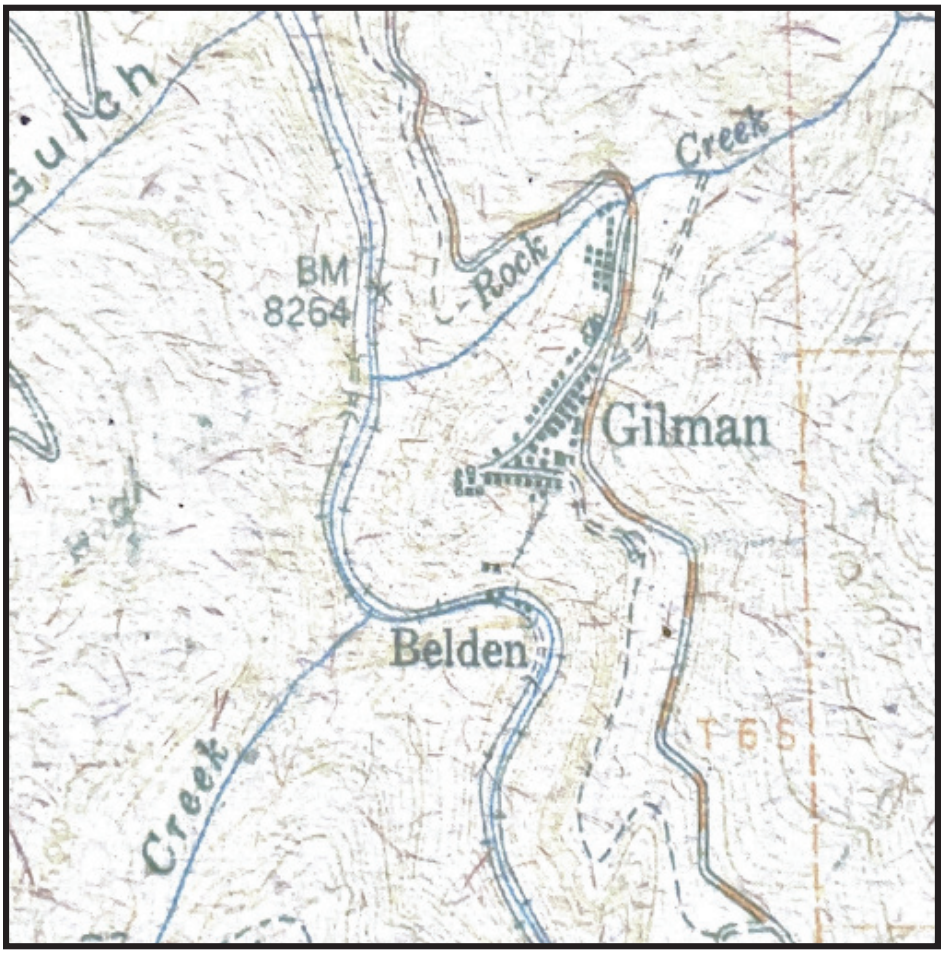
though it is referenced as such, Belden is not a town in the normal sense, as very few people ever lived in it, but it would more accurately be described as a shipping hub. All that remains of it today are the skeletons of industrial buildings once used to process ore from the colossal Eagle Mine and the railroad tracks used to transport it.

Although Belden today primarily hosts the structures of the former Eagle Mine which shut down in the 1970s, its history reaches back a full century prior, all the way back to the 1870s at the height of the Colorado silver boom.

The story of how Belden came to be, its founder Judge David D. Belden, and how it formed the nucleus of the Eagle Mine under the New Jersey Zinc Company has been all but completely lost to time. With that, the aim of this writing is to catalog this history from roughly 1879 to 1939 and return Belden once again to the minds of the people of the Eagle Valley from which it has so long been lost.

Geography

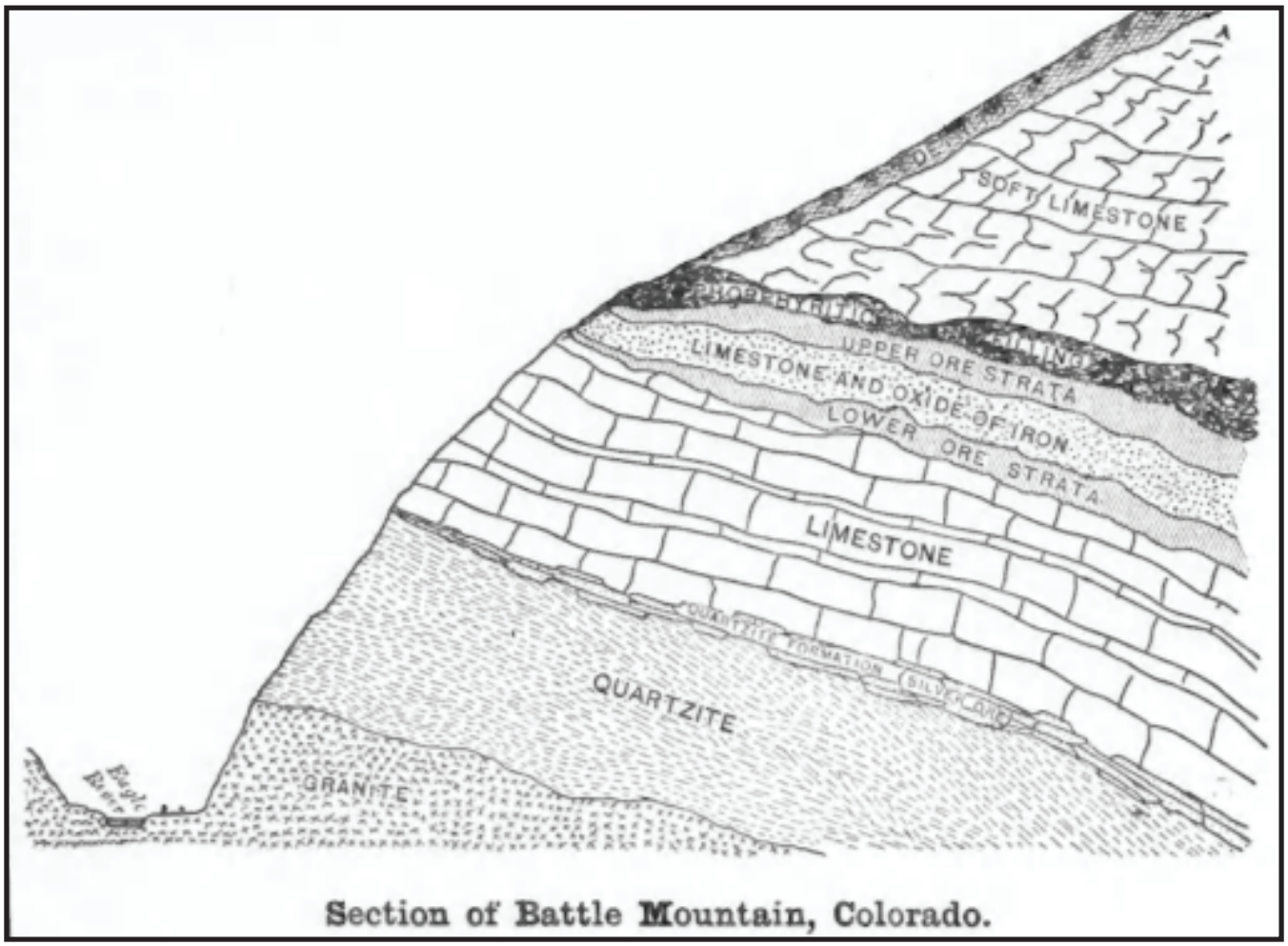
Belden sits in a vaguely defined area along the bottom of the western edge of Battle Mountain on the floor of Eagle Canyon. Battle Mountain is an enormous rounded peak set between Two Elk Creek on the southern edge of Minturn and the town of Red Cliff. It is so large that its northeastern end even encompasses Blue Sky Basin in the Vail ski resort. The mountain got its name sometime in the late 1860s following a fight between two Native American tribes, the Ute and the Arapahoe. Reportedly, the dispute took place over claims to hunting grounds and when the two tribes met on what later became Battle Mountain, the Ute won, driving the Arapahoe out.



(1950) Belden shown in relation to Gilman on an unlabeled map from roughly the mid-1900s. Highway 24 is shown in orange and white / *Unknown*

Although Battle Mountain is impressively large,

this writing will only focus on a fraction of it adjacent to where it meets the Eagle River on its western side. On this part of the mountain once lay—and according to some still does—an ore body of staggering proportions.



The Engineering and Mining Journal, 1887

This image from a mining journal published in 1887 shows a simplified cross-section of Battle Mountain with the major ore bodies and layers labeled. The region has three ore-bearing rock layers: the Leadville Limestone, the Quartzite, and the Bedrock (granite). The limestone was mined first, then the quartzite, and finally the bedrock. The Eagle River shown at the lower left already provides a sense of scale as to the sheer volume of ore once present, but a bird's eye view makes this even more apparent.

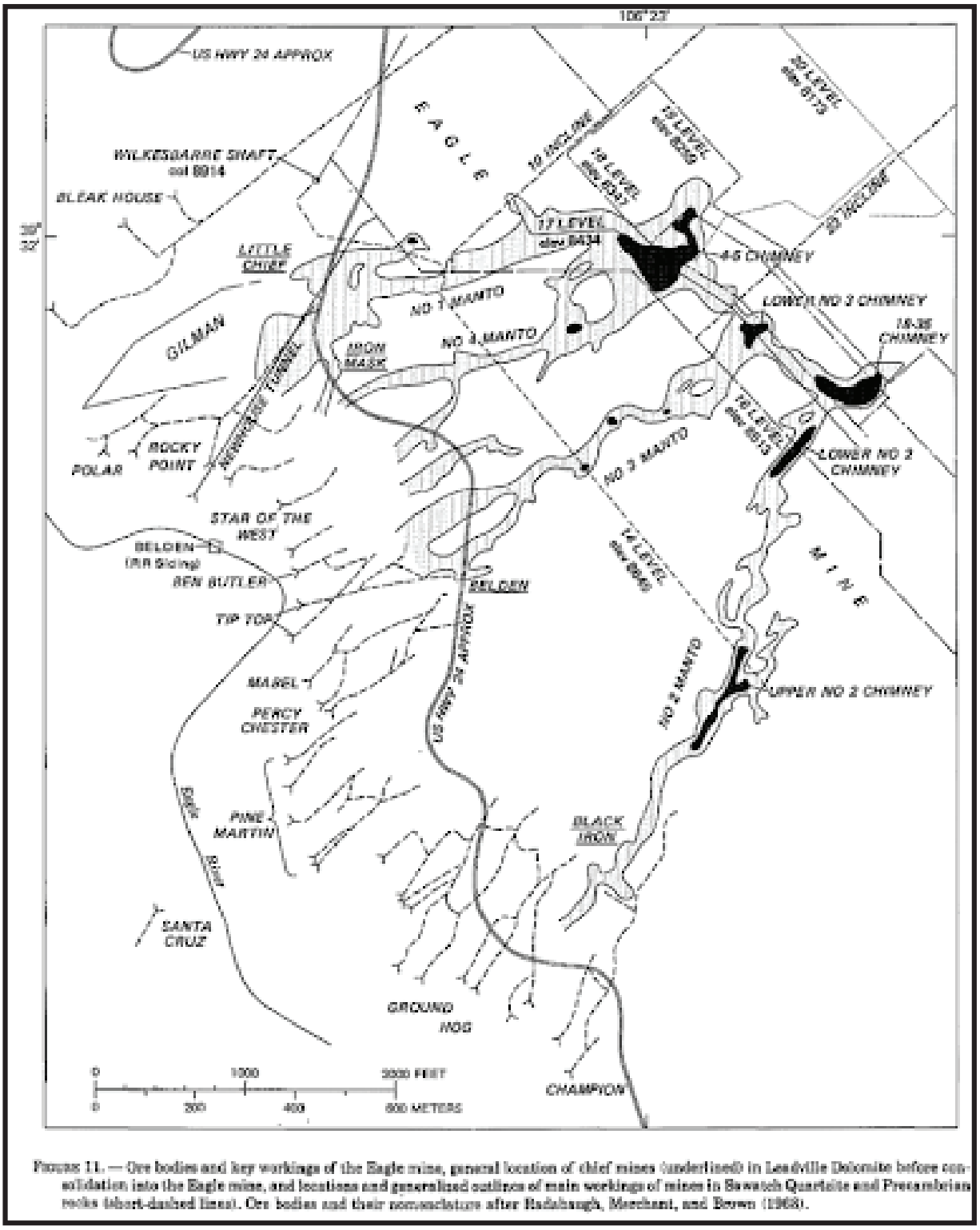


FIGURE 11. — Ore bodies and key workings of the Eagle mine, general location of chief mines (underlined) in Leadville Dolomite before consolidation into the Eagle mine, and locations and generalized outlines of main workings of mines in Sawatch Quartzite and Precambrian rocks (short-dashed lines). Ore bodies and their nomenclature after Radabaugh, Merchant, and Brown (1968).

Ore deposits of the Gilman District, Colorado

This map was originally published in a geology report from 1978. It highlights the monumental scale of the ore body beneath Battle Mountain in the gray and black shaded regions. The longest branches of the ore spanned almost a mile in distance. For those who are familiar with

Highway 24, a portion of the large curve in the road that rounds Gilman is visible at the upper left of the map. Belden is located toward the left center of the image labeled “Belden (RR Siding)”, not to be confused with the label “BELDEN” in the center of the image, which denotes the rough location of the original Belden mine. This map also includes approximate locations of many other mines which are referenced later in this writing.

The First Strike (1878-1879)

The origins of Belden are indistinct in some right, as the place came to be organically over time rather than in one inciting event. With that said, however, the formation of Belden can be directly traced back to the late 1870s, when the first strike on Battle Mountain occurred.

Although much of Colorado was inundated with settlers and development throughout the early to mid-1800s, the area that would become Eagle County was terra incognita. At the time, it made up the western portion of Summit County and was not yet a distinct region. It was almost completely enclosed, wrapped on all sides by mountains with an impassable canyon to the west, making exploration extremely challenging. The region was also ruled by Native Americans, primarily the Ute, and any white man who entered was met with a prompt order to leave. If said order was not obeyed, violence ensued. Due to this, there were very few white people in the Eagle Valley before the 1870s and even fewer permanent settlements.

However, in 1874, this all began to change. Silver-bearing lead carbonates were discovered in what would later be known as Leadville, just a few dozen miles South of the Eagle River. Following this, primarily in 1877 and 1878, thousands flocked to Leadville from all over the state and even the country in hopes of striking it rich, forming the largest rush in the history of Colorado. Even though the Leadville district was sizable and plentiful ore was available, the influx of prospectors was simply too much for the area alone to support and there became a high demand for food to feed all the miners. Since Leadville was covered with snow for more than half the

year, large-scale farming was practically impossible, so the need was met with the plentiful supply of game in the surrounding area.

Although many men took up the task of hunting and selling food to the miners, one was particularly important and he went by the name of James Denney (or Denning). Denney's region of choice to collect meat was the Eagle Valley, as both the hunting and fishing in the region were excellent and it was within a reasonable travel distance from Leadville. To reach the area, he traveled, presumably on the back of a horse or mule, over what would later become Tennessee Pass and his trail took him directly over Battle Mountain. On one of his hunting trips, likely sometime in mid-1878, Denney saw that the cliffs of Battle Mountain had limestone and porphyry in contact with one another with the surrounding rock stained a dark orange from iron oxides. As was true of most of the frontiersmen in Colorado at the time, Denney had a reasonable knowledge of prospecting and recognized the formation to be identical to the one present where silver had been found in Leadville.

In the fall of 1878, Denney shared the information of his finding with a group of men to whom he had sold elk meat. This group was made up of seven individuals: Hank Helmer, William Helmer, James McGrew, Peter Jones, Warner Sour, H. Barney, and Robert L. Rohm. The men knew that the information they had just been told was valuable, but none of them had the mining experience to personally substantiate it, so they grubstaked two knowledgeable prospectors named John (Jack?) Kelly and James Patton to check out the site on their behalf. Kelly and Patton left almost immediately for Battle Mountain after this exchange occurred, at some point later in the fall of 1878.

The duo returned just before Christmas of 1878, having staked the Little Ollie claim on the upper edge of the cliffs of Battle Mountain, just above the site of what would later form Belden. Samples that Kelly and Patton brought back from the claim showed the presence of silver-bearing lead carbonate, much the same as what was found in Leadville. The nine men were delighted with this result and celebrated their discovery with a hearty Christmas feast.

A few months later in March 1879, after waiting out the worst of winter, the full group of men left Leadville for Battle Mountain using snowshoes and handsleds. One can imagine how

challenging this trip would have been, as even though it was March, snow was certainly still piled high, with temperatures well below freezing, along with the fact that it was decades before the time of snowplows or clear roads. All in all, the trip took the group about a month and they reached their destination in April of 1879. They decided to stop a few miles short of where the Little Ollie claim sat and instead set up their camp at the confluence of Turkey Creek and the Eagle River, establishing what became the town of Red Cliff, Colorado.

Although these nine men knew that they had discovered something valuable, it is highly unlikely that they foresaw the truly monumental impact that would come of their first little claim.

The Boom Days (1879-1893)

Although the men who struck the Little Ollie claim were the only miners in the Eagle Valley in the early spring of 1879, this monopoly was quite short-lived. Word of their discovery spread like wildfire, both in Leadville and across the state, and by May of 1879, just a month after they had set up camp in Red Cliff, there were over 100 prospectors in the area, marking the beginning of Battle Mountain's boom days.

The trek to Battle Mountain was extremely challenging, as no roads existed across Tennessee Pass yet, so prospectors either had to break their own trail or follow those made by men before them. Many of these men made the trip to the area on exaggerated descriptions of a lush landscape with ore so rich you could just pluck it off the surface, but to their astonishment, these outlandish accounts weren't all that far from the truth. Battle Mountain had a colossal amount of available ore and, at that point, it was completely untouched and much of it was right at the surface. Because of this, word of this mining paradise spread even further. By late spring, sometime between May and June, there were an additional hundred prospectors in the area, reaching a total of 200 men.

Along with the enormous influx of people into such a confined area came the expected land conflicts and claim overlaps, necessitating authority to preside over these issues. To rectify this, in late May or early June of 1879, the Red Cliff Mining District was formed, hosting a small council of men who made rulings over mining-related disputes. This entity almost immediately proved invaluable to the area as, all told in 1879, over 100 individual claims were struck on Battle Mountain by upward of 300 people with frequent contention among miners.

Many of what would later become the most prominent claims of Battle Mountain were struck

in 1879. Some of these included the Little Ollie, Little Chief, Clinton, Florence, Eagle Bird, Silver Wave, King Fisher, Crown Point, Scimitar, and R.L.R–named after Robert L. Rohm, one of the nine men who were first to the region. Reportedly the first important ore discovery was made in the Belden mine (possibly first called the Keystone), struck by Judge D.D. Belden on May 5, 1879. The prominence of both this mine and its namesake later led to the section of Battle Mountain by the river being dubbed "Belden."

The Iron Mask, which would become the single most important claim on Battle Mountain, was also struck in 1879, by Joseph Burnell, a Leadville newspaperman. An early description of this mine written by Ole A. Gustafson illustrates the almost mystical aura that the mine and Battle Mountain as a whole had surrounding it at the time:

> *"In the upper portion were found caves large enough for a camp meeting, containing various grotesque and beautiful crystallizations, supplemented by solid ore bodies, glistening in the glare of the candles, making a veritable Arabian Nights entertainment, suggesting a desire in the minds of the explorers to become a possessor of only a small portion of such a mint of precious metals."*

Most of the initial claims on Battle Mountain were in the Leadville Limestone, but a few men were making headway in the other rock layers that came into prominence in later years. Robert L. Rohm for example struck the first claim in the quartzite, possibly called the Rocky Point, in June of 1879. He was a pioneer of this layer as extensive work in the quartzite wasn't done until upward of five years later in 1884. Also in 1879, L.A. Knutsen struck the first claim in the bedrock, called the Highland Mary. This strike was likely so early because it was in a fissure vein that was high in galena, a very shiny, visible ore, making it easy to spot. Still, it was one of very few early bedrock claims and the full value of the underlying rock of Battle Mountain was not widely recognized until decades later.

Although there were no issues finding ore on Battle Mountain at this time, many men found themselves having issues with what to do with it after it left the ground. The area lacked any kind of processing facilities in 1879 as it was such a young district and because of that the only option was to ship ore to Leadville over 20 miles away. Only a single specific record exists of one of these early endeavors, in which Mr. Vincent, owner of the Silver Age mine, shipped 250

pounds of ore to Leadville on the backs of burros to be sampled. When the results came back, he learned that the ore wasn't even valuable enough to pay for its transport. Some had more luck than him, however, as ore from both the Little Ollie and the Clinton ran between $65 and $80 ($2,051 and $2,521 in 2024) per ton as of 1879. Thankfully, as the prominence of Battle Mountain grew, the arduous trek to Leadville was made substantially easier by the creation of rudimentary roads over Tennessee Pass. The first of these was Kelly's Toll Road, which followed roughly the route that Highway 24 takes today.

Development in 1879 was occurring at a rapid pace and, by September, the Boston and Colorado Smelting Company had already begun work on a smelter in Red Cliff to cut out the expense of shipping to Leadville. Less than a month into the project though, widespread fear of Native Americans following the Meeker Massacre coupled with a string of bad weather shut the project down indefinitely and it had to be left unfinished over the winter.

As 1879 came to a close, most of the mines on Battle Mountain that showed any promise whatsoever had already been sold to mining entrepreneurs for below value. One example was the Belden mine, which was sold by its founder Judge D.D. Belden. The purchaser was the Belden Mining Company run by H.E. Armitage and, contrary to the name, this company had no involvement with Judge D.D. Belden whatsoever. This company also bought the unfinished Boston and Colorado smelter in Red Cliff and completed it in the spring of 1880, as well as about three miles of road between it and Battle Mountain.

Belden had not truly developed by the end of 1879. There were certainly several mines in and around it, but it was still largely empty and did not have any kind of major infrastructure.

At the start of 1880, outlooks on Battle Mountain were good. The initial chaos of discovery had mostly died down and the area was beginning to show its capacity to steadily produce ore. Battle Mountain had a smelter, sawmill, and a mining district complete with officers, all of which primed it for even further development into a prosperous region. Some even thought it may become one of the richest camps in all of Colorado.

It's reported that during 1880, the Belden mine was shipping out 20 tons of ore daily, which is especially impressive as, at the time, it would have been on the backs of pack animals or in

small wagons. By some accounts, it was "the best smelting ore yet discovered in Colorado."

1880 also marked the beginning of an incredibly influential copartnership that would define the future of Battle Mountain for the next 3 years. On February 15, Walter S. Cheesman, G.W. Clayton, and Judge D.D. Belden entered into a triumvirate and began to buy up claims. Cheesman and Clayton were both moneyed Denver businessmen and Belden was an accomplished lawyer and judge; the group brought an enormous amount of capital to the Eagle Valley. In the coming years, they gained control over a number of the noteworthy mines on Battle Mountain: The Cleveland Group–including the Black Iron, The Eagle Bird Consolidation–including the Silver Wave, May Queen, and Mexican Maid, as well as the Morgan Group. These men came to hold a substantial portion of Battle Mountain, as the Eagle Bird Consolidation alone comprised about 30 claims. Judge Belden was put in charge of managing the vast array of properties and spent the most time in the area, however, the influence of all three men was recognized. It is stated that they were all invaluable in the progression of the area because they freely spent their money to advance it.

Cheesman, Clayton, and Belden were not the only businessmen turned prospectors in the area; multiple other mine owners at the time were also capitalist converts. In particular, Henry M. Gilman, the superintendent of the Iron Mask and namesake of the town of Gilman, was a memorable Eastern capitalist.

1880 proved to be a relatively uneventful year for the Battle Mountain mines. Production was steady and the mines produced upward of $50,000 in silver and $86,473 in total ore value ($1.58 million and $2.73 million in 2024), but growth was severely bottlenecked by the lack of transportation. Belden ended 1880 in much the same form as the last, but this would change in the coming year.

Most of 1881 was quite similar to the prior years. The Battle Mountain mines steadily churned out ore, transported it to Red Cliff on primitive roads to be smelted, and shipped it off on costly pack animals or stages when it was refined. In November, this cycle finally began to change. The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad had completed the tracks to Red Cliff from Lead-

ville, finally allowing Battle Mountain ore to be shipped to the far superior Leadville smelters. Soon after that, a narrow gauge spur was completed to the foot of Battle Mountain on the East side of the Eagle River, right in the heart of Belden. This was when the area was first officially named after Judge D.D. Belden, as both the track and the stop at the end were dubbed "Belden Siding" in his honor. These tracks were soon widened to accommodate standard train cars and over the coming years a series of parallel rails were added, including a track on the West side of the river. The mines immediately took advantage of this advent and production expanded dramatically. The Belden Mining Company, for example, was reportedly shipping four 10-ton car loads of ore per day in late 1881.

(1885) An illustration of the railroad tracks in Eagle Canyon, southeast of Belden. / *Legendsofamerica.com*

1881 was also the year in which Cheesman, Clayton, and Belden made a few of their important acquisitions. D.D. Belden is recorded purchasing the Mexican Maid mine alongside two

unknown men named Edgar and Chancy Nichols. In the fall, the Eagle Bird and the Silver Wave were sold by H.J. Hawley, D.C. Collier, the Helmer brothers, and James McGrew to the trio for the measly sum of $22,000 ($694,000 in 2024). Just a year later, the same mines were estimated to be worth upwards of $200,000 ($6.31 million in 2024). This rapid increase in value can primarily be attributed to Judge Belden's adept management of the group's properties.

At the end of 1881, the Battle Mountain Mining District was prospering. Ore strikes were frequent, existing mines were expanding, and ore flow was good. Belden was also quickly taking shape as a key shipping point for the surrounding area.

Just as winter began to let up in March of 1882, the D & RG Railroad expanded to reach the mouth of Rock Creek, just northwest of Belden, and was open to traffic. This stop acted as another point out of which ore could flow from Battle Mountain, but it was never as widely used as the stop at Belden. A small community formed there, at the end of the line, aptly named Rock Creek. It was short-lived and hosted just a few houses, existing until at least 1884.

As of 1882, Cheesman, Clayton, and Belden owned 24 claims on Battle Mountain, and were actively shipping ore from four of them: The Eagle Bird, the Black Iron, the Pappoose, and the Blake.

The Eagle Bird mine was doing especially well in 1882 and by the latter part of the year it had produced 1,000 tons of pure lead and 22,000 ounces of pure silver. It's reported that on March 10, Judge Belden was shipping 50 tons of ore daily from the mine to Leadville on the tracks at Belden. By December, the mine had filled thirty-one 10-ton cars in a single week.

1882 was another very prosperous year for the mines of Battle Mountain. The railroad had proven invaluable to all of the operations, and without the limits of shipping capabilities, the mines were largely free to expand without restraint.

The new year at Battle Mountain came with new changes, innovations, and even more growth. On February 11, 1883, Eagle County broke off from Summit County and officially became its own region. Naturally, being the only town in the area with any kind of substantial population or industry, Red Cliff was named the county seat. Judge D.D. Belden and H.E. McCleland were declared the first county commissioners.

Also with 1883 came the first mention of tramways on Battle Mountain. These were long stretches of either cable or minecart track that spanned the distance from the top of the cliffs where most mines sat near Gilman to the railroad near Belden. Used to transport ore to the tracks and miners from them, tramways remained a key facet of mining operations on Battle Mountain for almost a century to come. Which mine had the first tramway is something of a contested fact, but the earliest known mention of the subject is in the Carbonate Chronicle from November 10, 1883, with Judge Belden reported to have constructed a tramway into the canyon, presumably from the Eagle Bird mine. Some claim that the Iron Mask made the first tramway down the side of Eagle Canyon in 1886, but this certainly could not have been true, as the article from 1883 implies that when written there were already more tramways present than just D.D. Belden's. Almost all of the tramways ended either inside Belden or directly adjacent to it, furthering its development into a key shipping hub of Battle Mountain. Even with this, Belden was still outshone by Red Cliff as the place where the most Battle Mountain ore went to be shipped. Tramways down to the railroad at Belden were extremely convenient, but also a luxury only the prodigious mines at the time could afford. Because of this, it made more sense for most owners to take their ore on roads to Red Cliff to ship it instead.

Ore from some of the high-producing mines was being steadily removed with consistent quality. Reports from 1883 show that, by the ton, ore from the Eagle Bird, Belden, and the Clinton, was between 30-50% lead, holding 8-30 ounces of silver, and occasionally a little bit of gold.

As 1883 went on, Eagle County surpassed $1,000,000 in total ore production ($31.57 million in 2024). This came from approximately 20,000 tons of ore priced at roughly $50 per ton ($1,580 in 2024).

(1883) View of Battle Mountain above Belden during the early boom days. The Iron Mask mine does not yet have a surface tramway in Iron Mask Gulch on the left, but a cable tram is faintly visible leading down from the mine in the center, making this likely after 1883, and possibly the oldest known picture of Belden. *Iron Mark Gulch, 1890-1900?, A0155-007 Gilman Photographic Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

At the end of 1883, trouble began to arise within the Cheesman-Clayton-Belden partnership. In November the former two partners had quite suddenly removed Judge Belden from his post as manager of the mines and brought on a civil suit for the sale of all their joint assets. At this point, the trio held upward of 30 mines on Battle Mountain and employed a great deal of men. For the duration of their legal proceedings, all of the mines owned by the group were forced to sit idle. This put an enormous damper on the entirety of Battle Mountain that lasted for over 4 months, until the suit was finally settled in the spring of 1884, after which work soon returned to normal.

1884 marked the beginning of substantial mining efforts in the quartzite layer of Battle Moun-

tain. Up until this point, all of the large mines had strictly been removing carbonate ore from the Leadville Limestone. The foremost of the new quartzite mines was the Ground Hog, which grew to great prominence in the coming years.

Battle Mountain's production was on a steady path upward throughout the mid-1880s. Between the years 1880 and 1884, the total production value of the mines was $1,933,884 ($62.29 million in 2024), and they produced about $500,000 annually for both 1884 and 1885 ($16.11 million in 2024). Large deposits of gold and silver were also discovered within the quartzite in 1885, setting up the total to be even higher the next year.

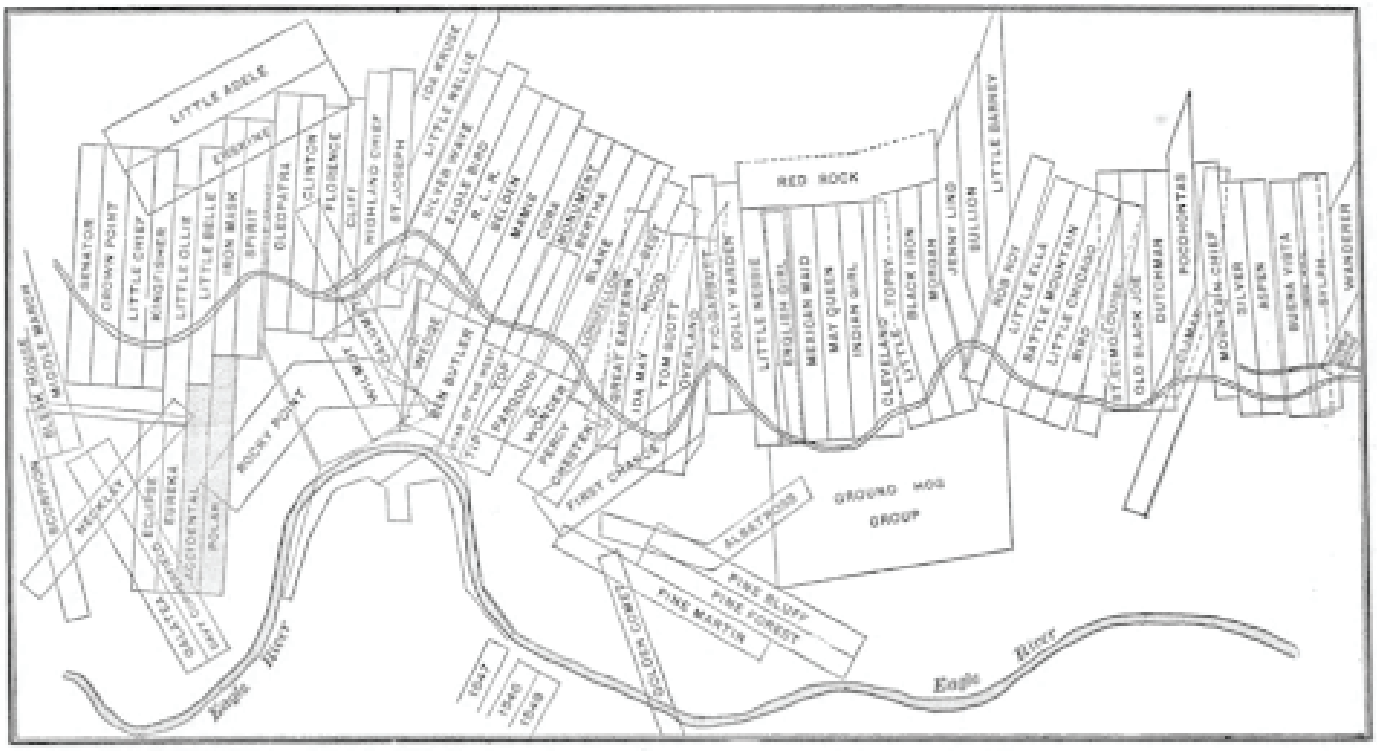
In 1886, a surface tram was completed to the Iron Mask mine with the tracks going through Iron Mask Gulch directly from Gilman into the heart of Belden. This was an extremely active tramway, carrying 100 tons of ore daily to the railroad tracks.

1886 was the most productive year for Battle Mountain to date, with the mines surpassing $1,000,000 in ore value ($33.58 million in 2024). Gold production alone made up $420,000 ($14.1 million in 2024) of this and the steep increase can largely be accounted for by the discovery of the quartzite ore deposits the year before.

In 1887, work on Battle Mountain had shifted from the upper ore bodies in the limestone to being done extensively in the quartzite. The ore of this layer was an abnormal clay-like substance and mining it was an unusual experience. In the words of *The Engineering and Mining Journal:*

> *"The clay itself as found is wet, plastic, and sticky so that everywhere through the mines you find wooden or iron scrapers for removing what adheres to the tools, cars, and even the clothing of the men. It might almost be called mining with a spoon, for the clay is so soft that a ¼ in. iron rod can be thrust into it several feet without bending. In places, caves of considerable length open from these layers; their floors are generally overlaid with the clay ore and the roofs hung with stalactites of gypsum and oxide of iron."*

Although Belden was primarily just a point from which to ship mined ore, there were a few select people who lived there. The only known specific record of such is from 1887 when John Kollnig and his family lived in Belden while he worked in the Star of the West mine.



BATTLE MOUNTAIN MINING DISTRICT, COLORADO.

*(*1887) A map of mining claims on Battle Mountain during the height of the boom days with most of the aformentioned mines visible. Belden is located in the crest of the largest curve in the Eagle River towatd the left side. Original roads across Battle Mountain are shown near the center of the image. *The Engineering and Mining Journal, 1887.*

At some point in the late 1880s, the Belden mine was fitted with a cable tram that ran directly alongside the Eagle Bird's surface tram straight into Belden. As tramways to the bottom of Eagle Canyon became prevalent, many commuting miners would get off the train at Belden and simply ride the tup to Gilman for work.

Toward the end of the 1880s, miners finally began substantial work in the third-mined layer of Battle Mountain, the bedrock. Ore existed in this layer as slim veins that formed between fissures in the rock. Notable mines here were the Mabel, the Tip Top, and the Star of the West.

Also at some point in the late 1880s, Battle Mountain gained a significant population of immigrant miners. Some Chinese and Italian people worked the mines, as well as Irish and Swedes.

(1889) Belden as seen in 1889, with the tram from the Iron Mask Mine coming down from Gilman. *Loading tipple, Battle Mountain, 1889, A0155-001 Gilman Photographic Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

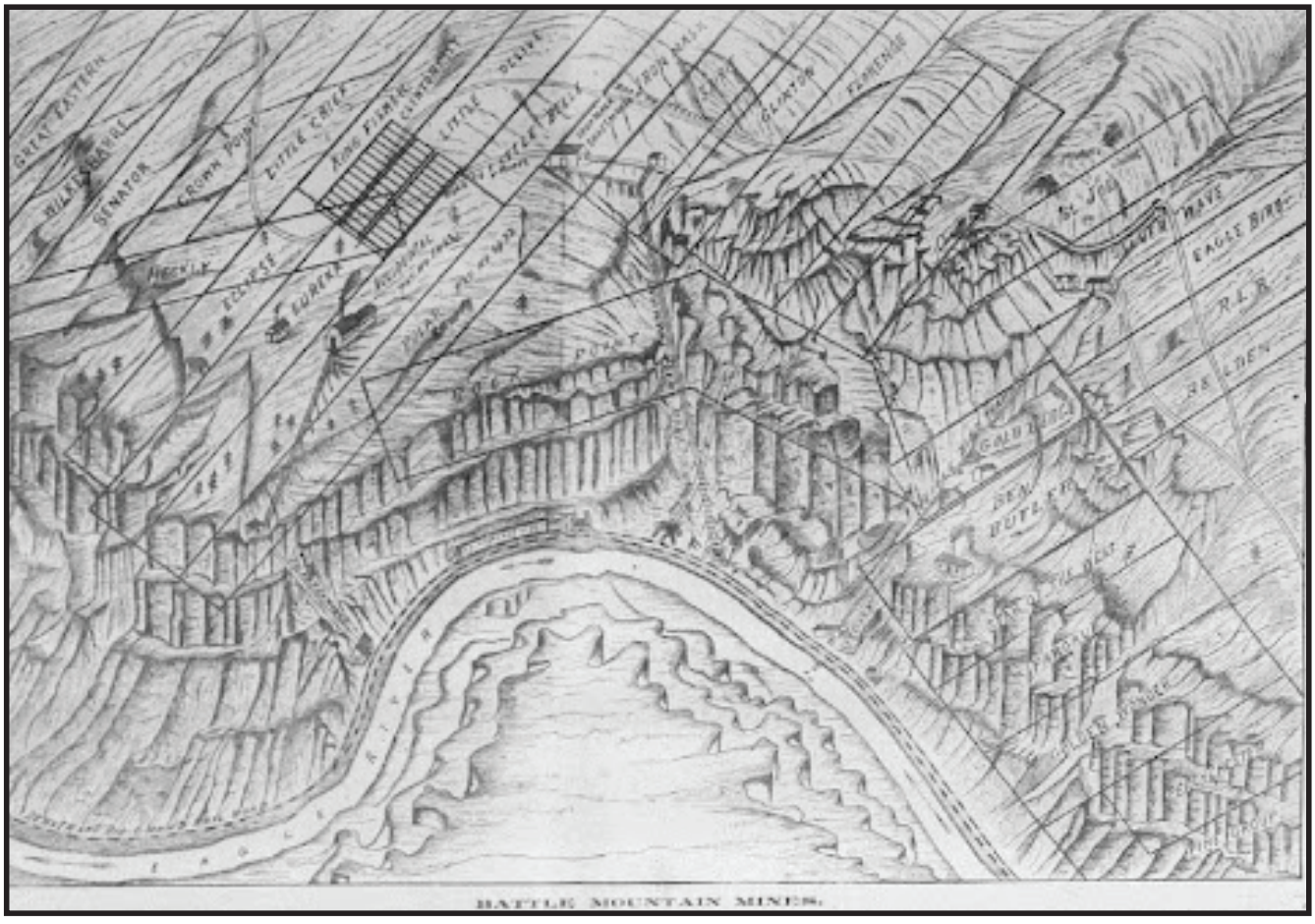
The railroad at Belden had sharp curves, heavy traffic, and occupied a very thin strip of land. All of these factors contributed to frequent issues with trains, one of which occurred in 1889.

Production remained consistently high throughout this period. Between 1885 and 1889, Battle Mountain produced $910,333 in gold ($31.23 million in 2024) and $2,809,329 in total ore value ($96.39 million in 2024). Belden maintained its position as the area's shipping hub, but its role was soon to expand.

(1889) Aftermath of a head-on collision of two locomotives on the tracks of the Denver & Rio Grande railroad in Belden. Visible in the background are multiple houses, likely occupied by miners and their families.
Gilman Photographic Collection, Colorado Scool of Mines Repository.

At some point in either 1890 or soon thereafter, a huge processing facility was constructed at Belden right at the base of the tramway from the Iron Mask mine. The aptly named Iron Mask Mill primarily worked ore from its mother mine, however, it was likely commissioned to process ore from other adjacent mines as well.

(1890) Mine working built on the precipitous slope southeast of Belden seen during the late boom days. *A0155-008 Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*



(1890) A hand-drawn map of claims on Battle Mountain published in a newspaper in 1890. Belden sits directly in the center at the crest of the curve in the river. *Leadville Herald Democrat, May 7, 1890.*

The colossal Iron Mask Mill was indicative of the sentiments of Battle Mountain miners as a whole at the time. Production was strong, silver prices were reaching unforeseen highs, and the obvious thing to do was expand as much as possible. Many of the mines were reaching 1000 feet deep, the average maximum depth from which easily processed ore could be retrieved, but people just kept on digging. The boom days of Battle Mountain were at their height and showed absolutely no sign of slowing down. Just three years later though, in 1893, everything would change.

(1890) The Iron Mask Mill at Belden, shown on a one-cent postcard printed in 1911. *Eagle County Historical Society.*

The Silver Crash of 1893

The Panic of 1893 and the resulting silver crash forever changed the course of Battle Mountain's history. At the time, no one in Eagle County saw the disaster coming and the first half of 1893 was treated the same as any other time in the boom days. Unbeknownst to everyone, however, the seeds of the impending disaster had been sown decades before.

Causation can be traced back to 1873, even before Battle Mountain had mines on it. Up until this point, the United States economy had been dually backed by gold and silver. This meant that all paper money was directly linked to and redeemable for set quantities of both metals. In April though, the Coinage Act of 1873 was passed, removing silver as a monetary standard, making gold the sole backer of the US dollar.

Five years later, in 1878, the Bland-Allison Act was passed, reinstating silver as a valid currency through the federal production of silver dollars. Alongside this, the act required the government to buy large quantities of the metal on a monthly basis to supply the manufacturing. This created a consistent demand for the metal and was certainly a contributing factor to the successful inception of silver booms across the West, including Battle Mountain.

In 1890, the Sherman Silver Purchase Act was passed, doubling down on these mandated silver acquisitions. Demand for the metal increased even more and, shortly after it went into effect, silver shot from $0.84 to $1.50 per ounce. Under the act, the government was required to buy 4.5 million ounces of silver per month. With such consistently high demand, mines sprang up all across the West, confident that no matter how much silver they produced the government would

buy it. Those who sold the metal to fulfill the government's demand were given an equal value of Treasury Notes, which were directly redeemable for either gold or silver. However, since silver was plentiful people almost always exchanged the notes for gold, which quickly began depleting the federal gold reserves. In addition, the increased circulation of silver was causing a decrease in the value of gold.

As of 1893, Colorado alone was producing roughly 60% of the nation's entire silver supply, with much of it going directly to the government. Battle Mountain undoubtedly made up a sizeable portion of the state production and heavily relied upon consistent federal procurement to steadily support its industry.

In the middle of 1893, the house of cards upon which Battle Mountain and innumerable other mines sat suddenly began to fall. On August 7, President Grover Cleveland repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act out of concern for the government's dwindling gold reserves. This seemingly inconsequential action almost immediately removed the single largest demand for silver in the U.S. In just the four days following, silver prices tanked from $0.83 to $0.62 per ounce. As prices continued dropping, people ran on the banks nationwide and several prominent Denver banks were forced to close.

The effects of the crash rippled across the nation and Battle Mountain was hit hard. Since the area produced almost exclusively silver, when the price sank mining became essentially worthless. Tramways came to a grinding halt and pickaxes were laid down as many of what had been prosperous mines just days prior closed their doors indefinitely, most never to reopen. The thriving community that surrounded the Battle Mountain mines had collapsed in the blink of an eye.

Since much of Colorado's economy was based upon silver mining, the Eagle Valley was far from the only area that felt the harsh effects of the silver crash and much of the state was out of jobs and out of luck. Many ex-miners flocked to Denver in hopes of opportunity, but none was found, causing much of the city to become homeless. In September of 1893, just a month after the initial crash, the state of Colorado reported that 377 businesses had failed, 435 mines had closed, and 45,000 people were without jobs, roughly 10% of the entire state population at

the time. With the knowledge that the job market in Denver was almost completely hopeless, some railroad companies even lowered their fares, offering afflicted people a lifeline to escape the state and get back on their feet. Many did and between 1890 and 1895, Denver's population decreased by 16,000.

The Dormant Days (1893-1912)

The Silver Crash of 1893 marked the distinct end to the boom period that preceded it. No more were the days of small mines, individual owners, and largely unstructured operations on Battle Mountain. No one knew exactly what would come of the mines in the new era, but in the meantime, they sat largely idle.

When the crash happened, most of the ore near the surface, particularly the carbonate, had already been depleted. Even though it was well known that there was still more in the mountain, the private owners that had dominated the previous era couldn't afford to mine it. This was exacerbated by the fact that most of the deeper ore was sulfide, which was substantially harder to process after it left the ground. Additionally, almost all the mines had dipped beneath the water table, meaning they required constant pumping to remain operational. The combination of all of these factors made it relatively easy for large companies to start buying up empty claims left behind in the wake of departing miners.

A few of the corporations that began working on Battle Mountain around this time were the American National Bank of Leadville, Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, and the American Zinc Company. Although these businesses were technically operating, their production was abysmal in comparison to what the area made before the crash. In 1896 for example, Battle Mountain hit rock bottom, producing just $68,000 in the entire year ($2.56 million in 2024). On the surface, it seemed like the region was rich with new developments and opportunities, but it was simply

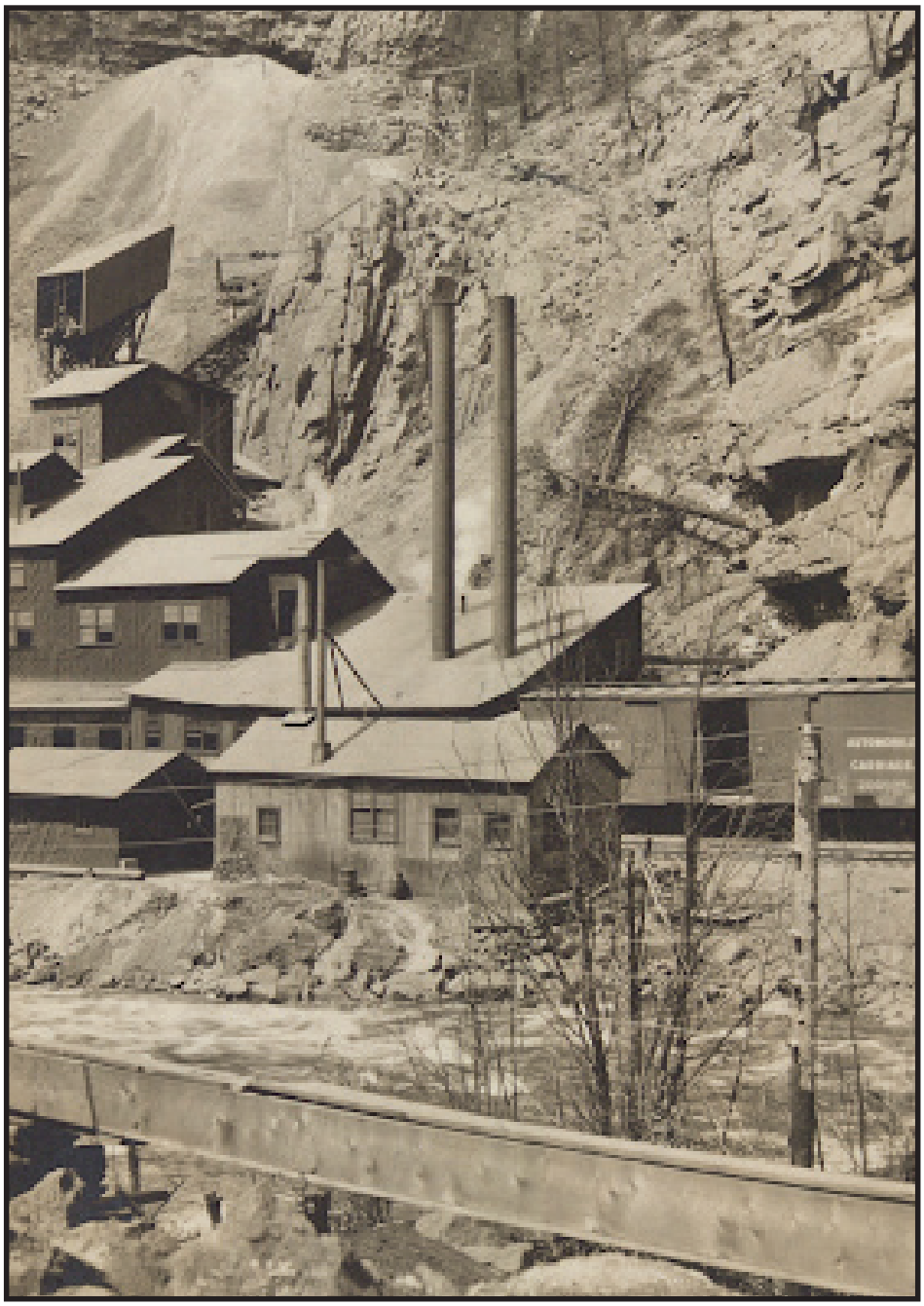
an illusion. In reality, Battle Mountain was dormant and was to remain so for almost 20 years to come.

Although Battle Mountain was still a husk of its former self, in the coming years, things began to look up slightly. At the turn of the century specifically, multiple advantageous developments were made. In 1900, the first zinc was shipped from Battle Mountain. Previously considered a worthless byproduct of silver production, its value finally started to be recognized. In the same year, both the Wilkesbarre Shaft and the Newhouse Tunnel began to be constructed. The Wilkesbarre Shaft was sunk straight down, directly in the center of Gilman, connecting to many of the lower-level mines. The Newhouse Tunnel was dug horizontally into Battle Mountain just above Belden, with a goal of 3000 feet in length. On May 4, 1900, the tunnel was 700 feet long, and it was 1300 feet by March 5, 1901. The Newhouse Tunnel eventually connected with the Wilkesbarre Shaft deep below the surface, laying the groundwork for what could become a tremendously large mine. By the end of 1900, Battle Mountain had produced $470,000 ($17.66 million in 2024), which was a vast improvement over prior years, but still far from the level of the boom days.

Also around the beginning of the 1900s, Belden finally secured its place as the chief shipping hub of Battle Mountain. Up until this point, most mine owners brought their ore on roads to Red Cliff before loading it onto trains, completely circumventing Belden. However, around 1900, with most of the mines owned by businesses instead of individuals, it proved most effi cient to ship all ore directly out of Belden instead of transporting it twice and the majority of them did just that. With this development, Belden could no longer reasonably exist as the hybrid railhead-town it previously had been and almost all of the few remaining residents moved up to Gilman or Red Cliff instead.

The dormant days of Battle Mountain also acted as a period of experimentation for the mines. Mining silver was essentially pointless, but that was not the only ore that Battle Mountain held, and a few other commodities were tested out as potential successors. For example, the Iron Mask and Black Iron produced roughly 200,000 tons of manganiferous iron ore during the late

1890s and early 1900s, marking both the first and last time Battle Mountain mined a considerable amount of iron. Also in 1905, the Iron Mask mine reopened under the Eagle Mining and Milling Company specifically to produce zinc. In order to make zinc concentrate, the company also constructed an enormous 150-ton roaster and magnetic separator at Belden, heavily modifying the Iron Mask Mill to do so.



(1905) The Eagle Mill at Belden seen shortly aftrer the Eagle Mining and Milling Company took over. The structure is at this point largely unchanged from the Iron Mask Mill. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

This represented the first significant push toward zinc mining on Battle Mountain, which still faced much skepticism. As G.H.F. Meyer of the Gilman Mining Company said at the time: "I personally believe that there is $5.00 worth of gold and silver for every $1.00 in zinc in our ground." The Eagle Mining and Milling Company and a few other corporations did prove him wrong, producing enough zinc during the later dormant period to turn a sizeable profit, but Battle Mountain still stayed out of the spotlight. Leadville recovered far quicker from the silver crash than the Eagle Valley did and as such it dominated the zinc market in Colorado for the first two decades of the 1900s, overshadowing Battle Mountain's comparatively meager production.

As the dormant days continued into the 1910s, a few of the companies on Battle Mountain including the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company, the American Zinc Company, and later, the Empire Zinc Company, began making efforts to consolidate multiple smaller mines into larger individual ones. In doing so, the operations of these companies assumed a fairly standard corporate structure, chipping away at the autonomy of the miners that was once so integral to the performance of Battle Mountain. This consolidation expectedly had blowback and many workers unionized, posing a considerable threat to the companies that employed them. With this, the Battle Mountain miners were able to achieve a reasonable level of security in issues such as fair wages, 8-hour workdays, mine safety, and scrip payment.

However, a second financial crisis, The Panic of 1907, reaching Battle Mountain caused a brief flare-up in what were generally amicable relationships between miners and employers. In 1907, two men by the names of Heinze and Morse attempted to corner the stock of the United Copper Company in New York. They utterly failed in doing so and the banks associated with their endeavor suffered massive losses. People panicked and ran on these banks, worsening the problem. These runs were eventually calmed down as it became clear that the banks were stable, but not before they spread. The second wave of runs hit trust companies, some of which had issued small short-term loans to corporations for things such as payroll. When the runs happened, these trusts stopped issuing new loans and the companies that needed them for their operations were hung out to dry. On Battle Mountain, the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company fell victim to this and were unable to complete their payroll. Miners were understandably livid and refused

to accept scrips in place of the cash they were owed. The situation was swiftly dealt with and, in the end, the miners were able to receive credit from local merchants in place of their wages. Although the event was largely inconsequential in terms of its broader impact, it did represent the first substantial labor conflict in the area.

Even though Battle Mountain was slowly working its way back up from its catastrophic fall following the Silver Crash of 1893, it still wasn't very active. Many men left the area entirely in favor of mining districts with more enterprise and between 1911 and 1912, it is reported that just 9 men were employed between Red Cliff and Gilman.

As the dormant days came to a close in the early 1910s, it became clear that mine consolidation would define what lay ahead for Battle Mountain. Whoever could hold the most mines in the area held the future in the palm of their hand and there were only two real contenders: the American Zinc Company and the Empire Zinc Company. American Zinc was well-known on Battle Mountain during this era. The company had been mining for a few years and had been publicly buying up claims by negotiating with business owners from Denver, Leadville, and the East Coast. Empire Zinc, however, existed almost completely under the radar. The company was a mysterious offshoot of a huge eastern corporation, the New Jersey Zinc Company, and had been quietly buying up Battle Mountain mines, drawing as little attention to itself as possible. This air of secrecy shrouded just how many properties Empire Zinc held and just how broad its influence might become.

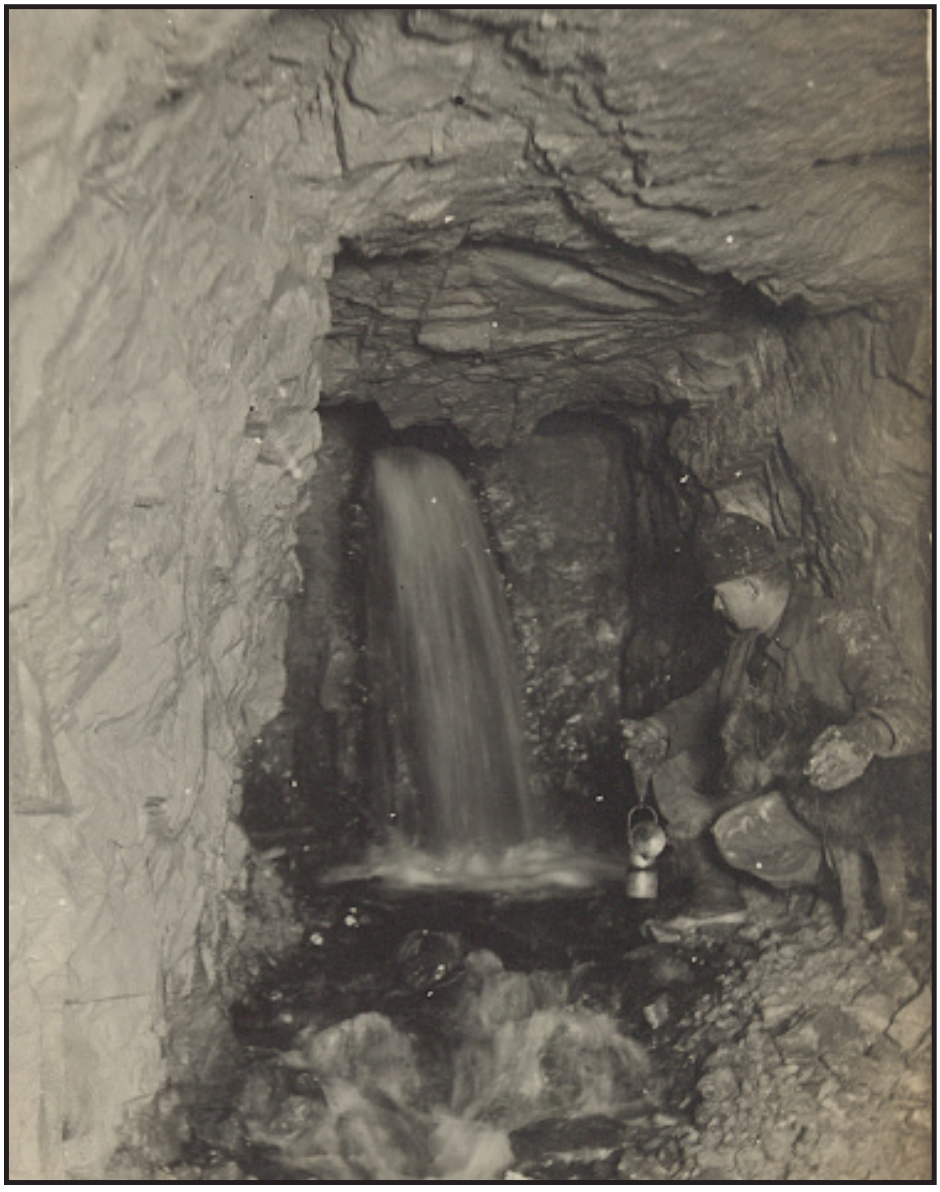
Empire Zinc and the Comeback of Battle Mountain

Beginning in roughly 1912, the Empire Zinc Company started to purchase many of Battle Mountain's important claims. This company began in 1902 under the Eastern giant New Jersey Zinc Company to expand its mining operations westward. Empire Zinc possessed a few other holdings in the American West in the early 1900s, but Battle Mountain swiftly became its central interest.

In the early 1910s, a fierce rivalry of property acquisition formed between the American Zinc Company and the Empire Zinc Company on Battle Mountain. Both entities saw the opportunity to make a colossal zinc mine by combining all the old claims, and they were scrambling to get as many as possible. Little record exists of many of the early purchases each company made, as in the end the victor was decided by just a few key mines. In 1913, Empire Zinc was able to buy the Belden mine and a handful of others by outbidding American Zinc. Investment from its parent company back East gave Empire Zinc a strong edge in the negotiations as it had substantially more capital than its rival. By 1914, it became clear that possession of the Iron Mask mine would determine the master of Battle Mountain. It held the largest known ore body of zinc in Colorado and it sat in the perfect place above Belden and between other valuable claims to form the nucleus of a mega-mine. Neither company was able to buy the mine this year, but in 1915, Empire Zinc finally acquired it from the Eagle Mining and Milling Company for $1,000,000 ($31.25 million in 2024). This purchase effectively sealed the fate of Battle Mountain, although a few more transactions occurred before it was official. Notably, Empire Zinc bought the Black Iron for about $4,000,000 likely in 1915 ($125.02 million in 2024). In 1917, Empire Zinc

bought the American Zinc Company, removing its final competitor, establishing a true monopoly over Battle Mountain's zinc.

With all of the claims it had accumulated, the Empire Zinc Company began to assemble the mechanized giant that was the Eagle Mine. The mine was based around prestigious claims of the boom days: the Iron Mask, the Black Iron, the Rocky Point, the Belden, the Little Chief, and others. The core of the Eagle Mine was made up of the Wilkesbarre Shaft and Newhouse Tunnel. Workers would enter the mine at the top of the Wilkesbarre Shaft in Gilman, and remove ore from various depths. All the ore would then be funneled underground to the Newhouse Tunnel where it was carted to the surface in Belden for processing and shipment.



(1916) Miner inside the Newhouse Tunnel holding a lamp with his dog. Flooding was common within the mines of Battle Mountain, especially as Empire Zinc dug below the water table. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

(1916) Sorting plant with covered trestle for carts coming from the opening of the Newhouse Tunnel in Belden. *Gilman Photographic Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

(1916) Men clearing a mudslide in Belden, showing widespread damage and debris burying both the tracks and train cars. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

To add to the challenges Empire Zinc already had in establishing the Eagle Mine, landslides frequently destroyed infrastructure in and around Belden. One particularly severe instance took place in the summer of 1916 which wiped out multiple structures on the hillside and covered the train tracks with feet of debris.

(1916) Damage to cribbing and tramway at Belden from a mudslide.
repository.mines.edu

Another similar incident took place just 4 years later, once again damaging multiple structures and completely covering the tracks.

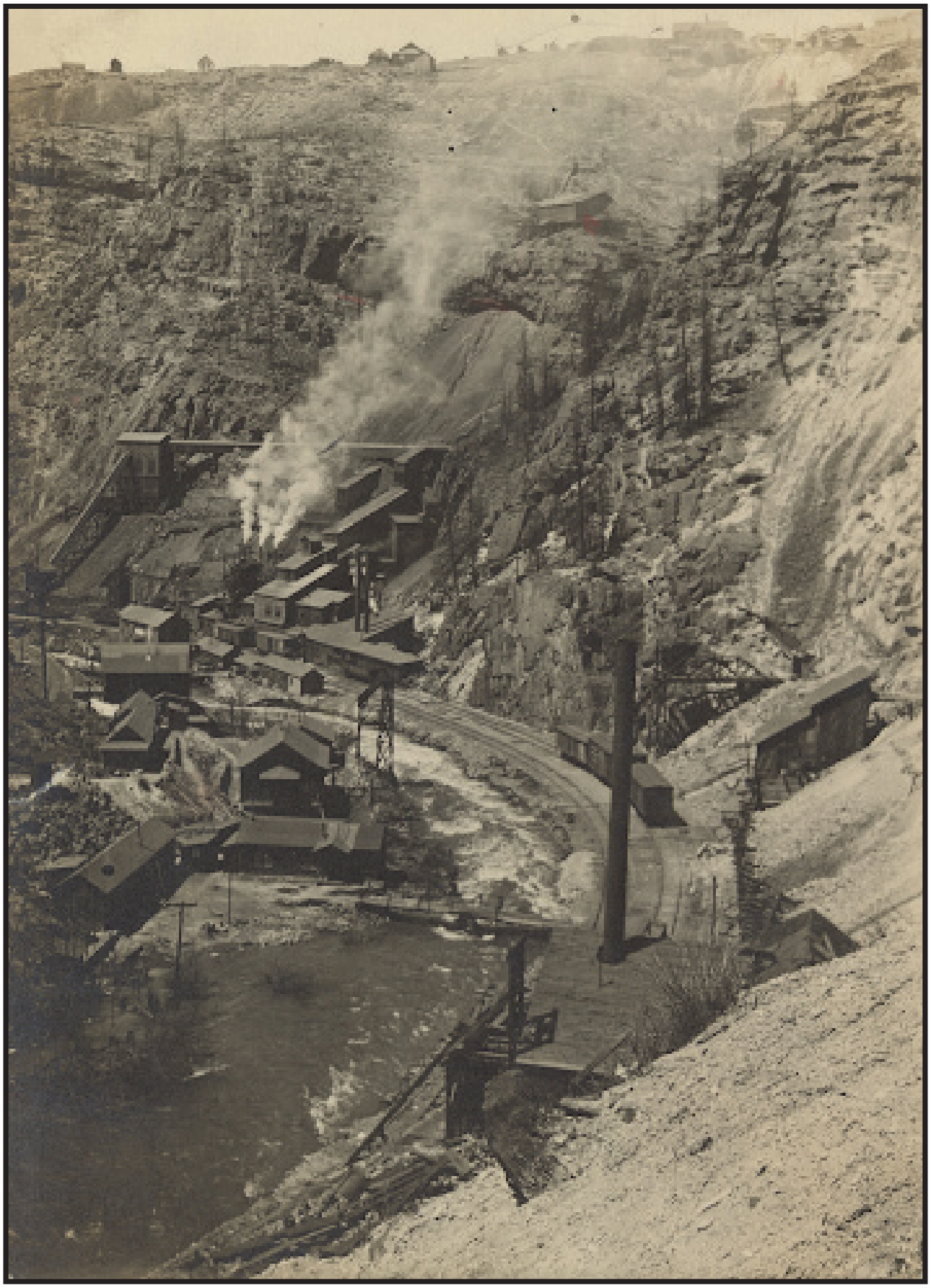
Not long after Empire Zinc took over, Battle Mountain finally began to reach its stride again. Between 1915 and 1919, the Eagle Mine produced $10,936,710 in total ore value ($199.56 million in 2024) with $9,208,005 being from zinc alone ($168.01 million in 2024). At this point, Belden had an abundance of buildings as the area was occupied by both the remnants of the previous period and new structures Empire Zinc was putting up.

Although Empire Zinc was doing well throughout the late 1910s, its tenure was not without hardship as it operated completely on the whims of ore value. Beginning in about 1919, the price of zinc took a steep dive, forcing the Eagle Mine to briefly close for the first and only time. The mine reopened shortly afterward but continued to struggle throughout the early 1920s.

Belden's challenging location also continued to cause issues with locomotives during the Empire Zinc era.

In the initial years following its takeover of Battle Mountain, Empire Zinc was processing its ore onsite using the Eagle Mill, which was made from the former Iron Mask Mill at Belden.

ABOVE (1920) Mudslide damage as seen from the heart of Belden. Processing buildings are visible on the right and the loading dock is visible in the center. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*



(1917) The Eagle Mill at Belden with many outbuildings visible, just after Empire Zinc took over the mine. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

(1915) A mild train derailment in Eagle Canyon just southeast of Belden. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

(1918) A severe train wreck and derailment just northwest of Belden by Rock Creek, likely caused by winter conditions. Men are visible standing on ther overturned cars. The box cars are full of ice which was likely harvested at Pando, the area that would later become Camp Hale. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

(1920) Panorama of Eagle Canyon showing Empire Zinc's workings at Belden at lower center near the river, Gilman on top of the cliffs at the center, and many remaining mine workings from the boom days toward the right. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

Some time in the early 1920s however, this stopped, and as of 1924, ore was being shipped either directly to smelters or to the Empire Zinc plant in Cañon City, Colorado. The Eagle Mill sat largely idle and fell into disrepair. At some point between 1925 and 1927 though, substantial alterations were made to the structures at Belden. A large portion of the Eagle Mill and the loading dock alongside it were torn down and replaced with updated buildings.

(1927) Belden as seen in 1927 under the control of Empire Zinc. The new Copper Tipple loading dock is visible in the lower center, the surface tram is to the right, and the processing buildings are to the right of that. Across the railroad tracks is the hardware building with a sign on it reading: "Eagle Mines of the Empire Zinc Co." Men are visible working on the tracks in front of the processing buildings. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

These buildings were not long to stay though, as just two years later, in 1929, the mill was torn down entirely. To replace it, Empire Zinc began excavating a cavern just above Belden to create an underground zinc mill. This move was completely unprecedented, as no mine had ever made any kind of underground mill, as in normal situations it was unnecessary and expensive. The Eagle Mine, however, was unique in that its core operations sat in a very confined area at the bottom of a narrow valley, permitting no space for an ample-sized mill. Even though the project was ambitious, it did prove successful and the mine began producing zinc concentrates shortly after its completion. Alongside it, huge zinc roasters were constructed at Belden, which used high heat to take the zinc sulfide concentrate from the mill and convert it into zinc oxide, allowing it to be smelted.

Around this time, Battle Mountain began to see a demographic shift. Mexican Americans began to enter the area for the first time to work in the mines, making up a key portion of the workforce. Seen as unwanted outsiders, however, these men and their families faced severe discrimination.

In the late 1920s into the early 1930s, large ore chimneys with pyrite cores were discovered in the Eagle Mine that were rich in copper, silver, and gold. Although outside of Empire Zinc's primary domain, they would prove to be invaluable.

The Great Depression and its wide-ranging effects could have easily led to a repeat of the Panic of 1893 on Battle Mountain had it not been for the adaptability of Empire Zinc. Following the initial crash of the economy, the price of zinc dropped, bottoming out in 1932 below 50% of its prior value, which was certainly too low to sustain the Eagle Mine in its original state. However, fueled by the new ore chimneys, Empire Zinc skillfully transitioned its Battle Mountain operation from zinc production to copper, silver, and gold. This quick-witted move allowed the Eagle Mine to not only stay open for the duration of the Great Depression, but also do reasonably well. Between 1929 and 1939, the mine was producing 85% of copper and 65% of silver for the entire state of Colorado, and from 1935 to 1939 alone it produced almost $28,000,000 in precious metals ($635.87 million in 2024). Empire Zinc did have to fire some employees and cut

the hours of those who remained, but it still performed exceptionally well for a large company at the time. As the Great Depression came to a close, Empire Zinc rehired the workers of the Eagle Mine and began transitioning operations back to zinc production, even remodeling the underground mill in 1939 to do so.

(1947) Men working at the zinc flotation section of the updated underground mill adjacent to Belden. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

Coinciding with the Great Depression years, the substantial size of the Eagle Mine began to raise questions of what to do with the huge quantity of tailings being produced. Initially, Empire Zinc dumped its tailings into the Eagle River, and while this was convenient, it was disastrous for the ecosystem. The river almost immediately became completely devoid of life from the heavy metals in the tailings water. Some efforts were made to alleviate this and in the early

1930s, Empire Zinc bought the Echo and Bolts Lakes on the Southern edge of Minturn to dump tailings into.

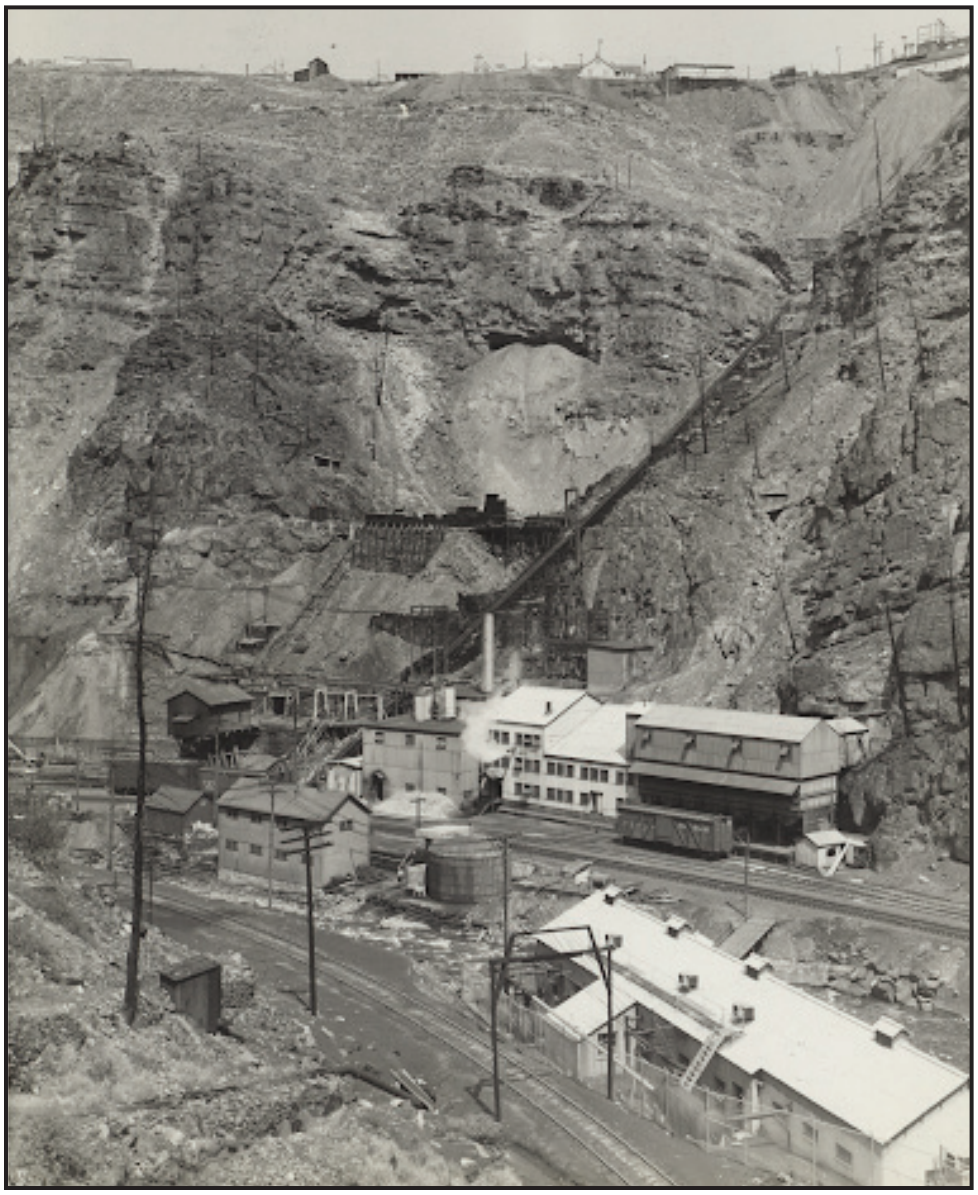
Under the control of Empire Zinc from roughly the 1930s onward, the tramway down to Belden was reasonably easy for the public to access and many even used it to commute to and from work. Ella Burnett, a nurse at the Gilman Hospital for over 30 years, recalls a time around the 1940s when she rode down the tramway. When sitting down, her legs were too short to reach the part of the tram cart that supports passengers' feet. Because of this, she had to ride the whole way down only secured by the doctor beside her holding on to her. This undoubtedly would have been frightening, as the tramway was unbelievably steep and lacked substantial safety equipment.

As the 1930s reached their end and the 1940s began, the Eagle Mine under Empire Zinc was doing tremendously well. The property held by the company was enormous, exceeding 200 acres and encompassing all of Gilman and Belden.

The Eagle Mine itself was equivalently large, with a labyrinth of an estimated 70 miles of underground tunnels. Rumor has it that there was even a shaft constructed that ran all the way to Red Cliff, which at an absolute minimum would have had to be over 2 miles long. According to Ella Burnett, the mine was exceptionally safe and accidents were quite rare; those that did occur were generally minor. She could only recall a single man who had died in the Eagle Mine during her entire career in Gilman: A miner was deep underground when he suffered a fatal heart attack and passed away. His death had nothing to do with his work in the mine. Also in the 1940s, Belden continued

LEFT (1930) A view of the tramway looking down the tracks from Gilman into Belden. A man is visible riding a cart downward. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

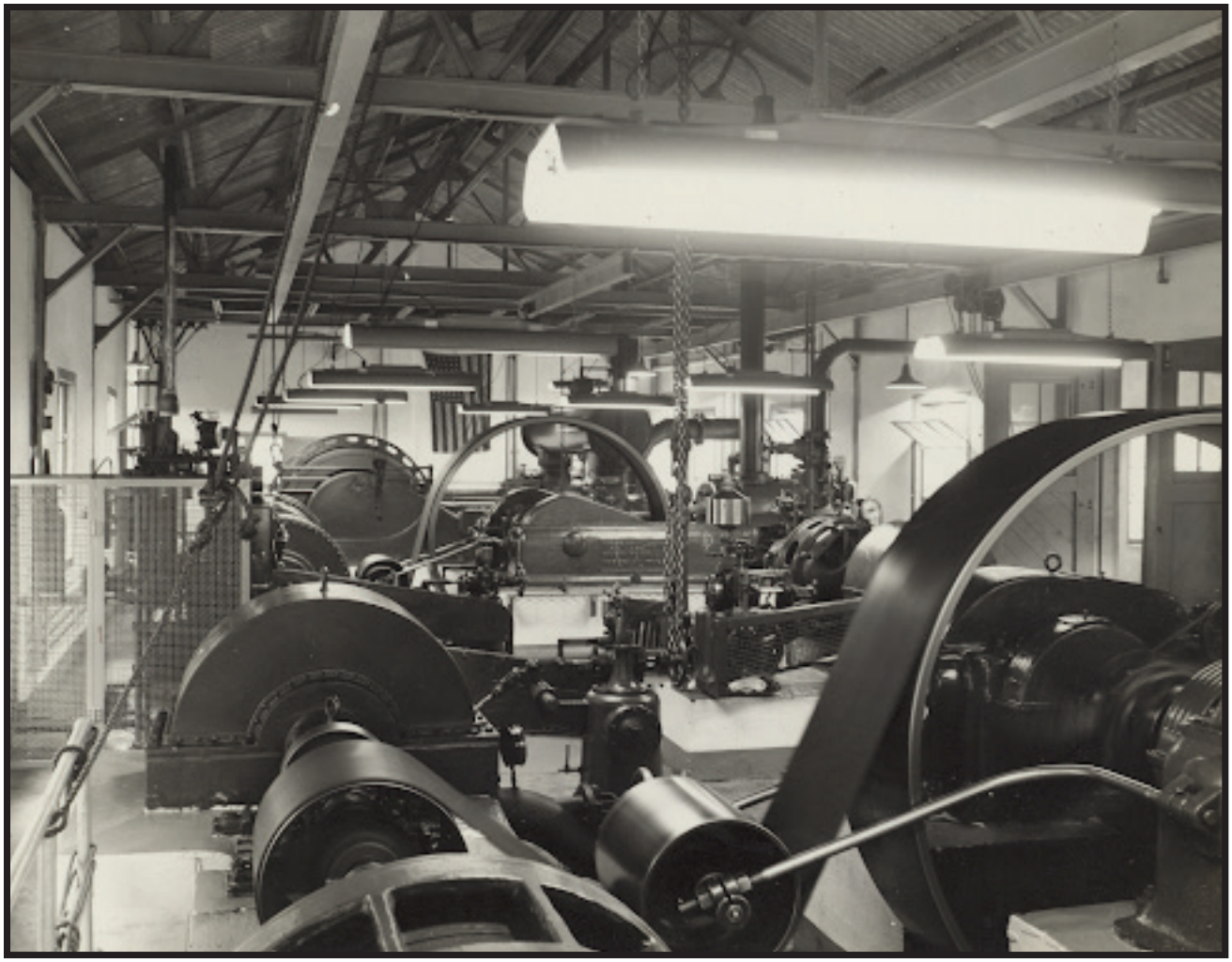
to grow until it reached its final form. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Empire Zinc constructed a number of large buildings to support its operations, covering almost every inch of available ground in Belden.



(1947) Belden as seen in its final form during the Empire Zinc days. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

Belden hosted almost all of the critical infrastructure for the Eagle Mine. The tramway is visible in the image above running down from Gilman on top of the cliffs. To the left of the base of the tramway sits the Copper Tipple, which was the primary loading dock for filling rail cars with zinc from the mine. To the right of the base of the tramway sits a series of huge buildings on the far side of the railroad. These structures were processing buildings that dried the ore after it had left the underground mill. Across the railroad from the leftmost of the processing buildings is the

hardware building which held spare parts for all of the machinery of the mine. Adjacent to it on the far side of the river sit the pumphouses. On the near side of the river toward the bottom right lies a large white building which was the compressor house.

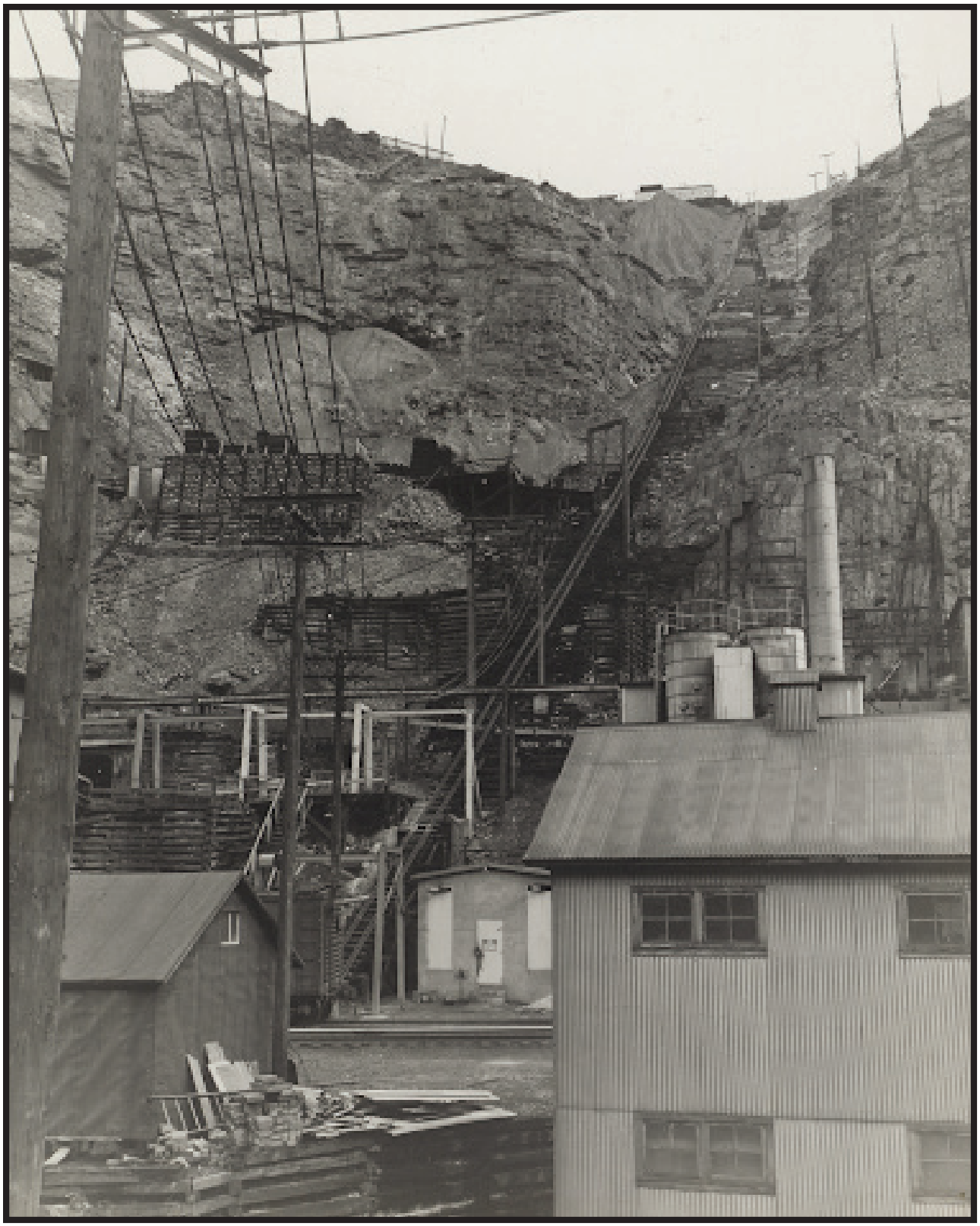


(1947) View inside the compressor house at Belden under the control of Empire Zinc. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

Alongside compressors, it also held Pelton wheels, which took water from the Eagle River and turned its flow into electricity for the mine, powering things such as underground lighting and ventilation systems. One of the Pelton wheels is within the rounded metal cover that is visible at the end of the shaft toward the bottom left of the image.

By the mid-1940s, the Eagle Mine had secured its place as a titan of the Eagle Valley. The mine employed hundreds of people, working both directly underground and in all the adjacent

workings; it was the lifeblood of a thriving company town and it was churning out ore day and night. Belden entered the mid-20th century at a high point. It had dozens of buildings in it, each with its own unique purpose for Empire Zinc's operations. Although the town of Gilman gets all the attribution for it, Belden was the true heart of the Eagle Mine. All of the ore left the mountain at Belden, it was all processed at Belden, and it was all shipped out of Belden. Belden was where the electricity was generated, Belden was where important repairs happened, and Belden was where all the critical work for the mine took place, even if it wasn't glamorous. The Eagle Mine boasted an annual production of $8,000,000 in ore ($179.15 million in 2024) in throughout the 1940s and every cent of it can be traced right back to Belden because every ounce of ore left the mine through it.

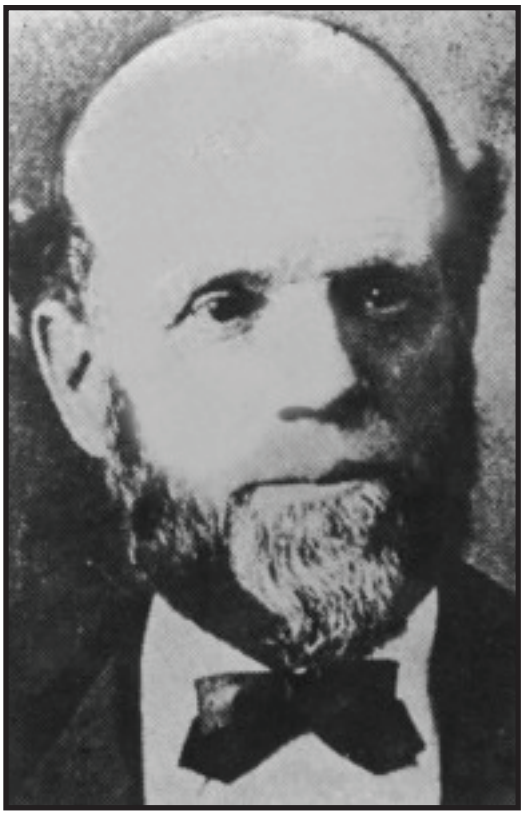


(1947) Mine workings at Belden looking up Iron Mask Gulch; the hardware building is visible at lower right and the tramway is visible leading up to Gilman. *Gilman Photograph Collection, Colorado School of Mines Repository.*

(1930) The southeastern edge of Belden showing abandoned houses, likely remnants of the boom days.
Courtesy of the Eagle County Historical Society.

Biography of Judge David Douglas Belden

As previously mentioned, Judge David Douglas Belden, more commonly known as D.D. Belden, was an extremely influential figure in Battle Mountain's early boom days and Eagle County's fledgling start. Belden's skillful management of his vast claim holdings directly led to the area at the bottom of Eagle Canyon bearing his name. However, his story extends far beyond his time in Eagle County, even beyond his time in Colorado. The man was a trailblazer everywhere he went, but his unparalleled impact has been all but entirely forgotten.



(1860) D.D. Belden as seen during his time as mayor of Omaha, one of the very few surviving photos of him. *douglascohistory.org*

David Douglas Belden was born to Harvey and Martha Bruce Belden on March 24, 1821, in Farmington, Trumbull County, Ohio. He was the fourth of eight children and had five brothers and two sisters. Very little is known about his youth, but he was reportedly always an eager student and a great lover of books. However, he never went to college and received only a high school education.

At the age of 25, in August of 1846, D.D. Belden entered the office of famous abolitionist attorney Joshua

Reed Giddings, where he studied law for one year. He then went to Warren, Ohio and studied under Rufus P. Ranney, the chief justice of Ohio. In 1848, Belden was admitted to the bar and began his career as a lawyer. At age 28, on May 7, 1849, David Belden married Emily C. Parmelee in Baltimore, Maryland. The two continued to live in Warren, where Belden began to see great success as a lawyer. He practiced law in Ohio for seven years in total, five as a private attorney and two as the prosecutor for Trumbull County. Even though he was still inexperienced when he became a prosecutor, he was reportedly so dedicated to his work that he never failed to convict a single person for the entirety of the time he held the job. The people of Trumbull County took notice of his skill, and Belden came to be an esteemed lawyer within the community.

In 1857, David and Emily Belden moved to Omaha, Nebraska, which, at the time, was a small but quickly developing city. Belden failed to find the same success in law here as he did in Ohio and was considering returning home. However, he instead began what would prove to be a lengthy career in politics and was elected as the third mayor of Omaha unanimously on March 10, 1859. With this office, Belden decided to address the claim-jumping issues that Omaha, like many other young cities, was facing. All land titles for the city came through Belden's office and he had to adjudicate conflicting claims and grant the deeds to the rightful owners. He was successful in this and, though he was only mayor for just under a year, he is remembered in Omaha history as the man responsible for alleviating the city of claim jumpers.

Toward the end of his time as mayor, in the fall of 1859, D.D. Belden was elected to the lower house of Nebraska state legislature. A year later, in late 1860, he was elected to the state senate and was unanimously reelected to the position in

1862. During this second term, the question arose of where the state capital was to be located. Belden and his allies supported its placement in Lincoln over Nebraska City, which came to fruition in the mid-1860s.

In 1860, David and his wife Emily had their first child, a boy named Edward Parmelee Belden. Sadly, he passed away within the same year and was buried in Prospect Hill Cemetery in Omaha, Nebraska. Later in 1860, the Beldens had their second son, Charles Parmelee Belden,

more commonly referred to as Charlie.

Alongside his legislative duties, D.D. Belden also dabbled in sheep farming. A newspaper in 1861 commended him and his partner S.N. Parmelee (likely a relative of Mrs. Belden) for their success in wool production and encouraged others to follow suit in what was, at the time, a largely untapped industry.

Sometime in the early spring of 1863, for an unknown reason, D.D. Belden resigned from the Nebraska legislature and moved to Denver. His family was not included in this relocation and he initially lived alone in the Colorado Territory. In April, Belden became one of many victims of the Great Fire of 1863 that swept through Denver, when over $2000 ($50,105 in 2024) of his assets, including his house, were burnt. He once again considered moving back to Ohio, but instead opted to venture further into the Colorado frontier, this time with his family.

As detailed in Mrs. Belden's journal titled Across the Plains, in October of 1863, the Belden family left Omaha in a covered wagon bound for "Pikes Peak Country". The group was made up of D.D. Belden, Emily Belden, Charlie Belden, who was three at the time, and Emily's brother, Daniel S. Parmelee. Their journey was plagued with abnormally bad weather for the time of year, and the Beldens had to endure dust storms, blizzards, and below-freezing temperatures. Additionally, Charlie fell ill with what was suspected to be whooping cough, at the time a deadly disease for a child his age. Despite this, the group remained optimistic, and even 3-year-old Charlie had a positive attitude, only complaining a single time during the entire month-long trip. In the end, the Belden family arrived safely at Gregory Gulch in Central City. Records exist of other Beldens and Parmelees in the area at the time, so the group was likely following relatives who were already there.

The area surrounding Central City was inundated with prospectors from the Gold Rush of 1859, and there was a substantial market for all kinds of goods. D.D. Belden recognized this and, soon after he arrived in 1863, he established a grocery and freight company called "The Gregory Store, Gregory Point." The store was based around a mule train that Belden owned that

ran between Omaha, Denver, and the mountains, as almost everything had to be brought into the area from more developed places. Utilizing this train, the store did everything from furnishing miners with pickaxes to supplying household items for cooking and baking. A few items sold at the Gregory Store that were listed in a newspaper advertisement include nails, lard, oysters (likely canned), coffee, and pineapples. In 1865, Belden enlarged his shop and transitioned primarily to wholesale. He was widely known as an exceptionally fair dealer and was extremely successful because of it. One instance is recorded in which the bulk price of flour skyrocketed from $16 to $30 (roughly $320 to $600 in 2024), but D.D. Belden kept his prices exactly the same. His prices were reportedly so low that he was underselling almost everybody in the country. Although the Gregory Store was flourishing for the entire time D.D. Belden ran it, he only did so up until 1865.

In 1864, while he was running his store, Belden became the head of the Gilpin County Democratic Party, marking the first of many political roles he would take on in Colorado. A year later, in 1865, he ran for state congress but lost.

Also in 1865, D.D. Belden moved on from the Gregory Store to a position as superintendent of the Smith and Parmelee Gold Company, an entity started a few years prior by relatives of Mrs. Belden. Although this was Belden's first job in the field of mining, his leadership proved invaluable. Over just the four-year period he led the company, from 1865 to 1869, it recovered over $500,000 in gold ($11.6 million in 2024). The importance of his work was furthered by the fact that the mine sat on the Gregory Lode, at the time the greatest gold-producing region in Colorado.

During his time as a superintendent, D.D. Belden further engaged in politics. In 1867, he was elected to the upper branch of the Colorado legislature for a four-year term. Soon after entering this role, Belden and a few other politicians put forth an act to form a state mining college, what would later become the Colorado School of Mines. However, even though it passed, the act was never funded and the idea didn't come to fruition until several years later. In the latter part of Belden's term as a legislator, the capital of Colorado had to be decided. Contrary to the opinions

of most at the time, Belden believed that it should be moved to Denver instead of Golden and he voted as such. This was an incredibly unpopular decision among the people, and he was even accused of selling his vote for $5,000 ($106,000 in 2024). *The Golden Transcript* reported:

> *"No man in the territory had brighter prospects for advancement than did [Belden], but his love for filthy lucre caused him to sell his honor to the Denver outfit upon the removal of the capital from Golden."*

It is highly unlikely that this accusation bore any merit and it is, in all likelihood, nothing more than political slander. This is because the newspaper reporting the supposed bribe was based in the very city that the capital was moved away from. Additionally, Belden was widely acclaimed as an honest man in the newspapers of the area. The Rocky Mountain Herald aligned with this, stating that he "never received a cent for his vote." In the wake of this controversy, in 1868, D.D. Belden ran for Congress as a Democratic nominee. However, he was still distrusted by his constituents and lost by a very slim margin.

Following this loss, in 1869, D.D. Belden and his family moved back to Denver. Although they didn't spend very long in Central City, the Beldens and their relatives were noteworthy figures of the area and are recorded as pioneers of Gilpin County.

In Denver, D.D. Belden once again resumed his practice of law and took on multiple endeavors in the field. Immediately after being accepted to the bar on May 5, 1869, he began to work alone as a defense attorney.

One of the first cases Belden had was defending three black soldiers accused of cold-blooded murder. Called "The Crevier Case", the trial was widely known in and around Denver. As the story goes, two brothers, Edmund and Louis Crevier, were driving a wagon through the plains of Eastern Colorado when they were stopped by a trio of African American soldiers who requested chewing tobacco. The brothers gave some to them, at which point the soldiers stepped back and opened fire, hitting Edmund in the head instantly killing him, and narrowly missing Louis, who escaped to tell the tale. The case was first seen in a federal court, at which point it was decided by the judge that the US had no jurisdiction over it and that it should be moved to a territorial court. However, little further reporting was done on the case following this and the final outcome of it is unknown.

Following the Crevier case, D.D. Belden quickly became a prominent lawyer in Denver and decided to transition away from a solo career. At the commencement of 1871, he started a firm dubbed "Belden & Powers" alongside partner Colonel E.H. Powers. The duo continued to run this firm throughout the 1870s, overlapping with some of Belden's other ventures.


BELDEN & POWERS,
Attorneys & Counselors at Law.
Office in Clayton's Block, Larimer street, Denver.
oc30-1y

(1871) The first recorded advertisement for Belden & Powers law firm in Denver, published on January 1, 1871. *The Rocky Mountain News,* January 1, 1871.

It is unclear exactly when D.D. Belden became a judge, but it was almost certainly within a three-year period spanning from 1869 to 1871 when the first mention of his position as such was made. Soon after this, Belden became the city attorney for Denver and continued as such from 1871 through 1872 (possibly 1873). While he was city attorney, Denver faced comparable issues to Omaha with lot jumpers in the "Denver lot scandal." Belden was once again instrumental in rooting the jumpers out, and he settled the matter, saving the city $35,000 ($900,000 in 2024).

Coinciding with Belden's early law career in Colorado, on May 24, 1870, his son Charlie Belden died at age nine and a half and was buried in Riverside Cemetery in Denver. D.D. Belden and his wife were understandably devastated and Mrs. Belden dedicated her journal detailing the family's trip from Nebraska to "Little Charlie" in the boy's memory. A tribute to Belden details the community's fond memories of Charlie, as well as his early aptitude for poetry:

"There are some among the older residents of Denver and Central City,
who still remember the lovely boy, who, even at that tender age,
gave unmistakable evidence of having inherited his father's conscientious integrity,
as well as a fondness for poetry beyond his years, and an aptness for memorizing
whatever touched his heart or appealed to his imagination. At seven years of age he recited with an effect and appreciation most remarkable in one so young, such poems as
"Oh! Why should the spirit of mortal be proud?" which, with its eighteen long stanzas,
he learned entirely of his own pleasure without suggestions from any,
as well as copious extracts from Shakespeare and other poets."

Also overlapping with D.D. Belden's time at Belden & Powers and his role as city attorney, he was involved in the founding of a church. In 1871, a group of people in Denver felt that there was a need for a more liberal church in the area and took it upon themselves to start it. To this end, the group had a few meetings in order to organize their ideas into a plan. The most pivotal of these meetings took place in D.D. Belden's house and it was here that the First Unitarian Society of Denver came to be. The Unitarian Society then began to officially organize a church, which both Judge and Mrs. Belden held active roles in. D.D. Belden was chairman of the first board of trustees and Emily Belden was one of the first officers of the Ladies' Aid Society. In its early days, the church struggled to find a permanent building and, for a few months in 1873, it even met in the law offices of Belden & Powers outside of their business hours. Eventually, the congregation acquired a building and settled down, where it was eventually named the Unity Church and remains as such today. The Beldens continued to be involved with the church for decades to come and were remembered as critical early contributors.

D.D. Belden was a man of high standing in his community in Denver for his good deeds. In 1872 for example, he was listed alongside others in a newspaper for donating money to a family in need.

As the mid-1870s neared, Belden transitioned once again toward a political career. In 1874, he was recorded as the Douglas County Attorney. Under this title, he wrote a very impassioned newspaper article sharing his opinions as to why the seat of Douglas County should be Castle Rock. Among other things, he claims:

> *"Castle Rock is a point. It is somewhere. Nature has done something just at that place, it has erected there a great landmark"*

Belden once again proved successful in his effort to define a county seat, as Castle Rock remains the seat of Douglas County today.

Also in 1874, D.D. Belden declined to be a candidate for mayor of Denver for unknown reasons.

In 1876, just after Colorado became a state, Belden was nominated as the Democratic candidate to represent Gilpin, Grand, and Summit County in the state senate. However, his opponent,

William W. Webster, beat him and he did not obtain the office.

In 1877, D.D. Belden is listed as the council for the third district of the Colorado legislature, which was in Gilpin County. However, in the footnotes of the same document, it is stated that "Vice D.D. Belden resigned."

(1876) A surviving stock certificate for 500 shares in the Belden & Tennal Mining Company in Gilpin County. *holabirdamericana.com*

Toward the end of the 1870s, Judge Belden's hearing began to fail, making it challenging for him to go to court. Because of this, he decided it best to return to a career in mining. Belden did not seem to have any specific region in mind for this endeavor but rather attempted multiple places across the state. The first record of one of these endeavors is in 1876, when Belden was part of a partnership in Central City called the Belden & Tennal Mining Company. He and his partner decided to publicly trade the company and issue stock certificates, a few of which remain to this day. Belden then branched out to other areas of the state. As of 1879, Belden had at least six mining claims in Gilpin County under the Belden & Tennal Mining Company as well as at least two in Hinsdale County under Lake City Mining & Smelting. Alongside this, at some point in the late 1870s, D.D. Belden ended up in Leadville, where he was recorded in the 1879

business directory as a lawyer. It was likely here that he first heard of the strike on Battle Mountain and became determined to follow it himself. Belden was one of the earliest men in the rush of Battle Mountain, as just a month after the first prospectors set up camp in Red Cliff, he had arrived in Eagle County. On May 5, 1879, D.D. Belden struck the Belden mine (possibly originally called the Keystone). The feat of establishing this claim can not be overstated, as the mine sat on the upper edge of the over 200 foot cliffs of Battle Mountain and Belden reached the site in spring when there was likely both snow and mud on the ground. Not to mention, he was 58 at the time, certainly not an age to be traversing such precipitous terrain.

Belden's importance in Eagle County became apparent almost immediately. *The Carbonate Chronicle* of Leadville details the following story:

> *"Mr. Belden is everywhere considered the first mining man of Battle Mountain. We very well remember the time when we sat with him on a stump beside a ten by five tent, the only shelter then to be found on Battle Mountain."*

While it is untrue that D.D. Belden was the first miner of the area, he was certainly not far from it and his efforts helped Battle Mountain to swiftly grow into prominence.

By 1880, Belden had begun to focus his mining efforts specifically on Battle Mountain and he and his wife had even moved to the area from Denver. It's reported that the two were living in their newly completed house in Red Cliff and were "settled very comfortably for winter." Their house sat upon a lot on the East side of Eagle Street which was 55 feet by 100 feet; quite a large homesite for the time. In November of 1880, it is reported in a single line in a newspaper section labeled "Mining Notes" that Judge Belden was confined to his room by an undisclosed cause but is as cheerful as ever.

Although D.D. Belden had started to concentrate on his prospects in the Eagle Valley over other areas in the state, he wasn't yet working there outright. In 1880, Belden was listed in the Leadville City Directory as a real estate and mine dealer holding a number of properties there, both mining claims and housing plots.

Also at some point in 1880, D.D. Belden sold off the Belden mine to the Belden Mining Company, which, despite bearing his name, had nothing to do with him and was under the man-

agement of superintendent H.E. Armitage. Belden did likely still possess some share of interest in the mine but was entirely uninvolved in the management of it from that point forward.

Likely soon after this sale in early 1880, D.D. Belden entered into a copartnership that would entirely define the duration of his time in the Eagle Valley. Although Belden held a great number of properties and was an expert in mine management, he lacked the capital necessary to develop his mines in the most efficient manner. However, two men he had become friends with during his time in Denver did. Walter Scott Cheesman was an incredibly wealthy railroad tycoon who was involved in several key developments in and around Denver. George Washington Clayton was another moneyed man of the area, although he made his fortune mostly in real estate. At some point in early 1879, the three men saw an opportunity for what could be an incredibly lucrative business venture and made a verbal agreement to someday make it happen. Under this agreement, Belden could run his mines hands-on using his prior expertise, Cheesman and Clayton could fund his efforts, and all three could reap the benefits. On February 15, 1880, they made it official, and D.D. Belden formed a contract with Walter S. Cheesman and George W. Clayton to form a legal copartnership. Under this agreement, Belden would yield all his property holdings, both mines and real estate, to the group, while Cheesman and Clayton would advance money toward his ventures to be paid back as a loan, beginning with a sum of $15,000 and increasing upon request. D.D. Belden held power of attorney over the triumvirate and controlled all aspects of its operation while his partners remained in Denver, although profits were to be equally distributed between the three of them.

The trio quickly proved to be a powerful force on Battle Mountain and were acquiring properties left and right, soon owning the most extensive mining operation in the Eagle Valley. A few of their more notable holdings were the Black Iron, the Silver Wave, the May Queen, the Mexican Maid, the Cleveland Group, the Morgan Group, and the Eagle Bird Consolidation, as well as multiple roads that ran from the mines to the smelter in Red Cliff. Belden operated a staggering number of mines on Battle Mountain at this time, as the Eagle Bird alone was made up of about 30 individual claims.

Even with an ever-increasing excess of mines, D.D. Belden proved to be an adept manager. It is likely for this reason that people began to refer to the region at the bottom of Eagle Canyon as Belden, because the Judge was truly the most notable man in the area at the time. He was frequently commended for his excellence in mining; in 1881, for example, *The Summit County Leader* reported:

> *"To the keen business foresight and mining sagacity of Judge Belden, the principal owner of the property, is due not only the bringing from obscurity to fame the mines of his section, but the building up of the entire section surrounding them."*

Also in 1881, D.D. Belden reportedly had an "unfortunate and painful accident" at one of the mines, but little more is known about the incident.

As time passed, Belden became more and more involved on Battle Mountain and drew away from his other pursuits. In 1881, he was still present in the Leadville City Directory, although he was notably absent from it the following year, indicating that he had truly set his sights on his mines in the Eagle Valley.

To Emily Belden's credit, she was quite supportive of her husband's endeavors, however she was not nearly as involved with them as he. In 1881 for example, she was still spending considerable time in Denver and helped found the Denver Children's Home, even becoming an early president of the organization. Walter S. Cheesman and George W. Clayton were also notable early contributors to the cause.

Judge Belden's mines continued to grow and prosper, with no end in sight. By 1882, the Eagle Bird had produced 1,000 tons of pure lead and 22,000 ounces of pure silver. It's reported that on March 10, Judge Belden was shipping 50 tons of ore daily from the mine to Leadville on the tracks at Belden. By December, the mine had filled thirty-one 10-ton cars in a single week.

In 1883, it was reported that D.D. Belden had achieved a monumental feat by completing the very first tramway on Battle Mountain down from the top of the cliff by Eagle Bird mine to the railroad stop at the bottom that bore his name. Although this tramway would have been unattainable for almost any other mine owner, with the financial backing of Cheesman and Clayton, Belden was free to invest in such costly infrastructure. Belden's tramway was also an anomaly

in that it was reasonably safe. *The Carbonate Chronicle* reported:

> *"He built the first tramway, and it was so well constructed, that two gamblers going down in an empty car when the cable happened to break, passed safely through and over all obstacles into the dumping car, without getting seriously hurt. We like to see somebody try it on another tramway."*

On February 11, 1883, Eagle County was formed by breaking off from Summit County. When this occurred, Red Cliff was named the county seat, as it was the largest town in the region. With the new county came the need for new county commissioners, and D.D. Belden was an obvious choice. He was very well-known in the community, had an extensive background in politics, and was well-liked by everyone around him. As such, on February 15, 1883, Belden was named the first Eagle County Commissioner, with H.R. McCleland appointed alongside him. However, D.D. Belden's time as commissioner was very brief, as he only served as such during 1883.

Judge Belden reportedly moved from Red Cliff to Gilman at some point during his time in the Eagle Valley, although it is unclear whether this is true or just conjecture. If accurate, this move would have likely been in 1883 and his residence there would have been short-lived.

As of 1883, all was going well for D.D. Belden in his mine operations. In August, when he met with Cheesman and Clayton to discuss their partnership, the two expressed their entire satisfaction with Belden's management of the mines. About a month later, on September 1, he gave a positive report to a newspaper in Leadville and said that that on all of his properties, he was "pushing work without lost time and shipping material." Belden was also "highly elated" over the prospects of the mines in the area and brought "glowing accounts." Others spoke very highly of Belden's management of his mines and his business expertise. *The Carbonate Chronicle* reported that he was exceptionally good at negotiating smelting rates:

> *"As far as we know Mr. Belden's management in its direct bearing to the mines, has been marked by the greatest economy and sagacity. We further know that Mr. Belden has secured, up to the last day of his management, better smelting rates than any other mining concern in the state, not directly connected with a smelter. . . No other could have excelled him in this."*

The paper also indicated that Belden spent money on the mines very prudently:

"In the management of the mine, we never saw the slightest indication of extravagance."

To make it clear just how influential Judge Belden was in the development of Battle Mountain at the time, the paper ended by saying:

". . . we are sure of one thing, that in the securing of the most valuable and largest mining area of the Battle Mountain carbonate contact, at extremely low figures, and in the invariable success with which he opened one prospect after the other into a producing mine, he has no equal, neither on Battle Mountain nor in the state. . . His faith in the mines of his selection was unbounded, and to him, more than all others combined, is due the prominent position of Battle Mountain of today. For, when one concern after the other became weary of the unreliability of the mines the first few hundred feet in from the croppings, he persevered, and stood for a long time before the public as Battle Mountain's sole miner."

Towards the end of 1883, D.D. Belden stood in incomparably high regard on Battle Mountain. Everyone around him recognized his unique talent for managing mines and every indication showed that he was making money hand over fist for both himself and his partners back in Denver. However, Belden's luck would soon run out.

On September 23, 1883, Mrs. Belden had reportedly left Red Cliff for the season to spend fall and winter in Denver, leaving D.D. Belden alone for the coming months.

Just over a month following the departure of his wife, on November 2, 1883, D.D. Belden was met with quite a shock. Sheriff N.L. Eby, namesake of Eby Creek, and Deputy Arthur H. Fulford, namesake of Fulford, Colorado, delivered to Belden a court summons and an injunction. The summons stated that Belden's partners, Walter S. Cheesman and George W. Clayton, were bringing a lawsuit against him to strip him of his power of attorney and force a sale of the trio's assets with a court receiver. The injunction stated that until the suit was settled, Belden was barred from essentially all managerial duties for the mines, including buying, selling, or taking on any new debts. *The Carbonate Chronicle* said that

"Mr. Belden was so seriously affected by the sudden attack of his old friends that he shed tears."

Weekly Register-Call added to this, stating:

"It is reported that Judge Belden is quite ill, brought on by the worry and excitement from the uncalled for legal proceedings that were instituted against him."

While D.D. Belden was understandably bewildered and hurt by such a lawsuit coming out of the blue, the other people on Battle Mountain were even more confused than he. *The Carbonate Chronicle* stated:

"Upon what ground and reasons the receivership was demanded we do not know. . ."

Similarly, *Weekly Register-Call* said:

"This is the first suit of the kind that has ever been brought in Colorado, and its outcome is watched with a lively interest. In every way it is a unique muddle, and the more one looks into it, the more complex and confusing it becomes."

Although most didn't understand the nature of the lawsuit brought against Belden, they knew the impact it could have on Battle Mountain. With such a substantial amount of property owned by the trio, residents of the area were very concerned about the mines shutting down during the legal proceedings. This also came at a time when significant ore discoveries were being made daily and the mines had never before looked so promising. *The Carbonate Chronicle* expressed this sentiment, saying that:

"The property [Cheesman, Clayton, and Belden] own employs a great many men and the shutting down of the same would be quite a blow to the camp."

Unfortunately, the miners' fears almost immediately came true. Due to the injunction that was issued to D.D. Belden, he was unable to pay his workers or manage whatsoever and dozens of mines were forced to close down indefinitely. This put between 60 and 80 men suddenly out of work, and they were understandably livid, although they still had faith in Belden. *The Carbonate Chronicle* details this:

"At present, all person dependent on them, are anxiously waiting for their money... immediate steps should be taken to satisfy all wages and outstanding accounts. The present condition of affairs at the mines is wholly unpardonable. The miners and other persons having claims against the firm, feel reluctant to force the matter to an issue as far as it concerns the settlement of accounts. They like Mr. Belden and have no doubts as to the solvency of the firm; but they want their daily bread . . ."

Weekly Register-Call parallels this account, also affirming that Belden was not the cause of the troubles:

"In the history of the camp this is the first time a complaint was ever made that the men employed by the Judge could not get their money. Everyone knows the fault is not his, which fact adds to the disgust and ill feeling toward Messrs. Cheesman and Clayton."

In addition to issues pertaining to unpaid wages and men out of work, the mines themselves began to suffer without the attentive care of D.D. Belden. All of the carbonate mines had unstable roofs, particularly the Eagle Bird, and required nonstop work to keep them from collapsing. *Weekly Register Call* describes this:

". . . a large amount of damage is being sustained by these properties in being allowed to remain so long idle. . . Whatever may be the outcome of this litigation a force of men should be immediately put to timbering wherever needed on these valuable properties. . . We understand that it was the desire and wish of Judge Belden to have some timbermen employed to attend to this during the interim while the suit was being settled, but he was not able to carry his point. In the end we fear the mines will pay dearly from this neglect."

Once again, the residents of Battle Mountain had faith in D.D. Belden and his management, but knew he was powerless to act in saving the mines. In agreement with this sentiment, *The Carbonate Chronicle* and by extension all those on Battle Mountain urged the three men to settle the suit as quickly as possible.

The people of Battle Mountain respected the merit of D.D. Belden and hoped that the lawsuit would play out in his favor. *The Eagle River Shaft* for example said:

"We also hope to see Judge Belden realize a fair and equitable return for his zeal and labor in developing the mineral wealth of Battle Mountain."

Weekly Register-Call agreed with the hope that Belden would receive what he deserved, saying:

"This is the wish of the entire camp. It is not a sentimental wish either, but one based on just desserts."

The Carbonate Chronicle also aligned with these views and was even so confident in Belden's success in the area that it published a $10 to $1 bet ($310 to $31 in 2024) that no one could objectively prove that the Belden administration had not been the most financially successful entity on Battle Mountain up until that point.

About a month into the lawsuit, in December of 1883, all of Belden, Cheesman, and Clay-

ton's mines were still idle, leading to their colloquial description as a "black-eye" on the camp of Red Cliff. However, some developments were made that indicated that the dispute would likely be soon resolved. The receiver appointed over the trio's assets, Mr. Amos Bissel, had visited Red Cliff in order to straighten out all of the unpaid accounts and wages the firm had. D.D. Belden had assisted him in doing so, as no one knew the intricacies of the group's mining operations except for him. The Eagle River Shaft reported that this action would likely be Belden's final business transaction on Battle Mountain. With this, the residents of the area knew that his days were numbered. In February of 1884, the lawsuit finally ended with Judge Belden yielding his interests to his partners and leaving Eagle County. Even though he would be sorely missed on Battle Mountain, the decision came as good news to the miners there, as the trio's quarrel had seriously impaired the entire area's business.

Following the verdict in February 1884, the people of Battle Mountain were finally able to learn the specific details of the dispute between Cheesman, Clayton, and Belden. The story began at some point around the fall of 1883, when Cheesman and Clayton had colluded behind Belden's back and made a decision to remove him from the partnership. To carry this out, the two started a civil court case in Arapahoe County, in which they sued Belden, removed his power of attorney over the firm, and appointed a receiver to liquidate all the trio's assets and distribute any profits remaining after the debts of the firm were paid. Simply to initiate this action, Cheesman and Clayton had to front $20,000 to pay the receiver ($624,738 in 2024). Even though the two were accomplished businessmen, this was quite a large sum of money at the time, and the court required a third party to attest to the fact that they would be able to pay it. Cheesman and Clayton picked their acquaintance and fellow tycoon David Moffat to do so, and on November 1, 1883, he testified to their ability to pay the sum. This testimony was especially powerful as Moffat was, at the time, also president of the First National Bank of Denver, the biggest bank in the state. With the receiver fee sorted, Cheesman and Clayton were then free to advance the lawsuit, which they did, and D.D. Belden was handed his summons the following day. Even though Belden was an accomplished lawyer, he chose against representing himself in the

matter and had attorneys Patterson, Markham, and Thomas fight the suit on his behalf instead.

At the time the lawsuit hit, Cheesman, Clayton, and Belden held an enormous number of assets under their firm, far more than anyone on Battle Mountain had been aware of. The noteworthy mines in the Eagle Valley they owned included the Eagle Bird, the Silver Wave, the May Queen, the Mexican Maid, and the Black Iron. Alongside this, the men owned upward of two dozen additional mines on Battle Mountain, totaling over 30 properties. The firm also owned all the infrastructure associated with the mines, including multiple mill buildings, at least two access roads from Red Cliff, and the Eagle Bird tramway. Furthermore, the trio held some share of the Belden mine, a remnant of D.D. Belden's first endeavor on Battle Mountain. Also, with the way the men structured their initial agreement, Belden's home in Red Cliff was technically the property of the firm. However, unbeknownst to the miners in Eagle County, the holdings of Cheesman, Clayton, and Belden extended all over the state. The men held dozens more mines in both Lake County and Summit County, including one on Tennessee Pass called the Cedar Rapids mine. The firm also had over twenty real estate properties in Leadville from Belden's brief involvement in the field in 1880. Additionally, the group held an unknown but high number of shares in the Belden & Tennal Mining Company in Gilpin County that Belden had kept from years before the copartnership was formed. Even with such a substantial number of known possessions, it is likely that the men had even more assets that were not recorded.

With such vast holdings and intricate operations, the exact value of the firm, although critical to the lawsuit, was not then known, but was estimated to be roughly $500,000 ($15.62 million in 2024). Cheesman and Clayton adamantly denied that the group's assets were worth anywhere near such a value, but D.D. Belden, who would have certainly had a better understanding of the value of the mines than his peers, affirmed that it did. Regardless, as both claims were nothing more than speculation, it became the job of the court to determine the true number. Amos Bissel appointed Prof. O.H. Parker and Major J.J.B. Dubois as assessors over the properties, and the men traveled from Denver to Red Cliff to begin their work at once.

Outside of the financial implications of the lawsuit, the court also dealt with a lengthy ver-

bal dispute between the two sides. Cheesman and Clayton's lawyers presented their case first, lodging many complaints against D.D. Belden. According to their story, in both the development and general management of the group's mines, Belden built multiple permanent structures, like the tramway and mills, and spent a tremendous amount of both his and his partners' money doing so. Cheesman and Clayton claimed that they had advanced Belden $182,131 in total for his efforts ($5.7 million in 2024), and he had only paid back $34,025 of it ($1.1 million in 2024). This left a debt of $148,106 ($4.63 million in 2024) without added interest, which with it would be closer to $170,000 ($5.31 million in 2024). Alongside this colossal debt, Cheesman and Clayton essentially claimed that Belden's management was downright terrible. Some of their accusations include that Belden wasn't using the money made from the mines to improve them, Belden wasn't keeping his partners fully advised on his business decisions, there wasn't a "marked improvement" in the mines under Belden's leadership, Belden didn't manage the mines economically, the mines were in bad shape and were falling apart under Belden, Belden wasn't paying the expenses, Belden wasn't paying the workers, Belden was keeping all recent profits–upward of $90,000 ($2.81 million in 2024)–completely to himself, and to top it all off, Belden's management of the mines was unsatisfactory, unskillful, improper, and unprofitable. When it came time for D.D. Belden's lawyers to make his case, although they acknowledged that Belden was in fact deeply indebted to his copartners, they vehemently denied all other accusations. Belden said that he consistently kept Cheesman and Clayton up to date on all he did and that the two had never expressed any kind of dissatisfaction with his management whatsoever up until the moment the lawsuit was dropped. Had they, Belden affirmed, he would have swiftly made improvements to his management, as he was always open to his partners' input, but they never had any to give. Belden also said that the mines had certainly improved under his management, and this was true. As a single example, the estimated value of the Eagle Bird increased almost tenfold from $22,000 ($694,000 in 2024) to $200,000 ($6.31 million in 2024) in just its first year under Belden's leadership. Alongside this, it is highly unlikely that even a single one of Cheesman and Clayton's other accusations was truthful, as every known newspaper that covered the

lawsuit paralleled Belden's side of the story and denied that of his partners. However, with the nature of the lawsuit, it didn't matter who was telling the truth, as Cheesman and Clayton held a controlling interest in the firm, and Belden didn't, so he was powerless to stop them from dissolving it.

As 1884 began, the case was nearing its end. The assessors that were appointed to evaluate the group's assets, O.H. Parker and J.J.B. Dubois, had completed their full examination of the properties in a little under two weeks and returned to Denver, where they began preparing a report for the court. Right before they were going to submit it, D.D. Belden unexpectedly decided to compromise the case. He yielded all of his interest in the company to Cheesman and Clayton and formally retracted all the derogatory things he had said of them in the heat of the moment. In return for this, his partners forgave him of all his debt, canceled the mortgage they had made against his house in Red Cliff, and paid him $5,000 cash ($156,000 in 2024). It is unclear exactly why Belden had suddenly decided to fold, but one can speculate that he was told in advance by the assessors that their evaluation would not work in his favor and that if it were reported, he would lose the lawsuit and be forced to pay a large sum of money to his partners.

From the point immediately following the conclusion of the suit even until today, the largest question at hand remains to be why Cheesman and Clayton decided to betray their longtime partner. All of the accusations they made against Belden's management of the mines were baseless, as every newspaper in the area consistently reported how skillful the man was as a superintendent and how he was unparalleled across Colorado. Similarly, their claim that the mines were unprofitable under Belden's leadership is blatantly untrue, as mining records and newspapers alike report the monumental success of the mines he controlled. In addition to this, if the motive for the suit was to get the money Belden owed them, Cheesman and Clayton would not have let him go debt-free after he gave up his interest in the firm. Furthermore, the men couldn't have desired direct control over the properties, as after the suit the mines went into the care of H.E. Armitage of the Belden Mining Company, and it was not clear what would become of them in the future, although it is certain that Cheesman and Clayton were out of the picture. This leaves

the only possible goal of the lawsuit to be getting rid of D.D. Belden. No one at the time knew why Belden's partners wished to do such a thing and it is unlikely that anyone ever will.

In the end, the lawsuit cut short D.D. Belden's tenure in the Eagle Valley. Even though he only resided in the area for a span of less than five years, his impact was immeasurable, and he was truly appreciated by everyone around him on Battle Mountain. *Weekly Register-Call* said following the conclusion of the suit:

> *"We congratulate the judge that this disagreeable business is at last settled, and regret that Eagle County suffers the loss of one of its best citizens in his ultimate removal from this locality."*

The Eagle River Shaft provided a similar comment on the situation, saying:

> *"In his departure Eagle County will lose the most enterprising citizen it ever had."*

Although Belden was forced out of Eagle County long before his due time, his legacy in the valley lived on, and the region at the bottom of Eagle Canyon continued to hold his name.

Following his departure from Battle Mountain, D.D. Belden moved back to Denver to live with his wife. In 1885, he was recorded on the Colorado census as a retired lawyer and he appeared to have opted for a quiet life in his later years. However, Belden had not yet lost his mining fervor, and by 1887, he was back mining in Central City for the third time. He wasn't living here permanently, as he was also in a Denver business directory in 1887, but he was actively involved. In January of 1887, Belden was running the Winnebago Mining Company and continued to do so for the duration of the year. In September, it's reported that he had completed a mill on his property, and in December he had found a "fine body of ore." As of April 1888, Belden was still working on the Winnebago property mining gold, although he couldn't have continued doing so for much longer.

Toward the end of the 1880s, D.D. Belden's health began to decline to the point that he was no longer able to work. In 1889, it was reported that he retired from active business and, following this, he lived out his final years with his wife in Denver. However, despite this, it's reported that although he couldn't engage in business, he was still a very cheerful man. The end of Belden's life was uneventful in comparison to his bustling earlier years and the extent of his

recorded activities in Denver during this time were that he and Emily Belden remained closely involved with the Unity Church they had helped found decades prior. Aside from this, the two made a trip to Europe in 1891, and on the journey across the Atlantic, Belden expressed his love of the ocean, describing it as "sublime beyond description." Little else is known about the last years of D.D. Belden's life, but his health continued getting worse as time went on.

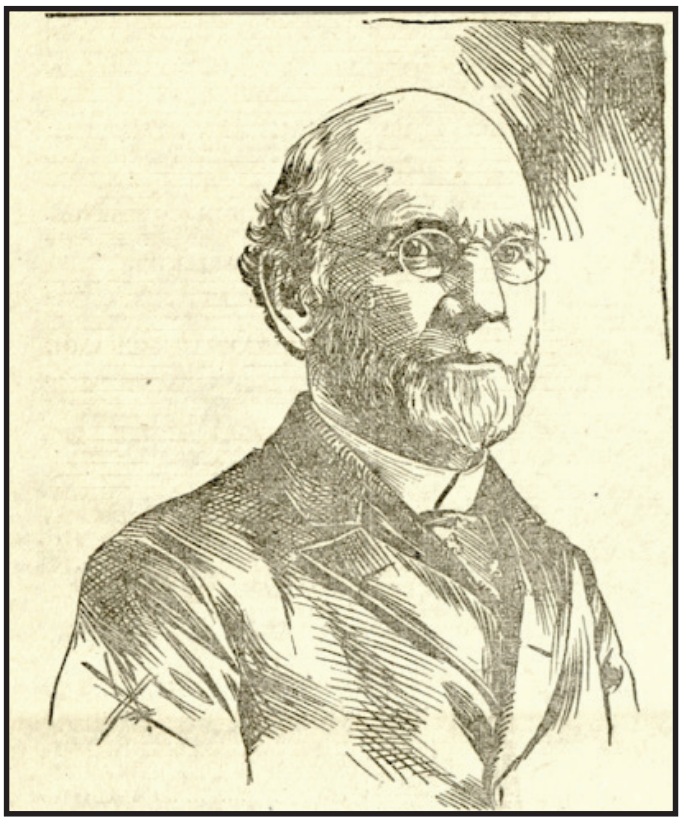
On November 22, 1897, Belden was hit by a brief stroke of paralysis. On November 28, he suffered a second more severe one, and his health steadily declined in the days following. At 5 o'clock in the morning on Thursday, December 2, 1897, at age 76, Judge David Douglas Belden breathed his last. Alongside the series of strokes in the days prior, his health had been poor for years, so his death came as no surprise. However, the passing of D.D. Belden represented the fall of a titan of Colorado history.

Belden's funeral was hosted at the Unity Church and was well attended by his friends, family, and peers. Many spoke highly of his life and his faith. Dr. A.B. Hyde for example said:

"The Maker of human life made everything beautiful in its time, and from my personal experience with Judge Belden I can say that the world was better for his presence. He was a man who walked humbly with the Lord, his God."

The pastor of the Unity Church at the time, Rev. David Utter, delivered a similar sentiment regarding Belden:

"What that man did has had its effect for two generations. A man of clear vision, of quick insight, of unusual force of character, with a passion for truth, justice and right, he was yet compassionate and tender-hearted as a child. Life's disturbances did not sorrow him nor cause him to lose faith in his fellow men. The papers have told of the offices that he held and of his public trusts. Many men have served as faithfully as he but those of his friends who are gathered here will recollect his many generous acts. He was a strong character and a good man—that I know of his religious nature, faith, and work. In his search after truth he was thorough and unsparing. Judge Belden was the real founder of Unity church and it remains as his monument to-day. He was the one above all in our little company in whom the public had confidence."



(1897) An illustration of D.D. Belden published alongside his obituary in multiple magazines and newspapers shortly after his death. *The Philosophical Journal*

Although most who spoke at the funeral talked of the high points in Belden's life and his best qualities, one man, Rev. W.G.M. Stone, did bring up what was likely the judge's greatest fault. He said that some 25 years prior, in about 1872, D.D. Belden had stopped a move to racially integrate Denver's school system. However, this was not the only mention during Belden's life of him being a racist man. In 1868, during his campaign as a Democratic nominee to the Senate, a Republican newspaper published an article to undermine him and favor the other candidate. In this article, it is stated that Belden held the view, which was at the time part of the official Democratic party platform, that whites should be the only race involved in governmental affairs. While this sentiment is certainly denounced in the America of today, it must be noted that this occurrence was just three years after the conclusion of the Civil War and that racism was rampant in Colorado at the time.

Although D.D. Belden did have a stain upon his legacy, people who were close to him during

his life continued to speak of him in high regard in the months that followed his funeral. Multiple obituaries say that D.D. Belden was renowned for his kindness and integrity as a lawyer and he was even dubbed the "widows and orphans' lawyer" for his concern for those in need. Another obituary published near his hometown in Ohio told an anecdote that attested to Belden's honorability. Reportedly at some point during his time in Colorado, Belden had talked several men from Warren, Ohio, into investing in a mining project that he was sure would be profitable. The prospect failed, however, and when it did, Belden fully reimbursed the men for all of the money they had put in out of his own pocket. Because of acts such as these, many remembered Judge Belden as an exceptional businessman in that he was kind and honest in his dealings. *The Philosophical Journal* also praised Belden in an obituary, saying:

> *"He was a sweet-spirited man, with a giant intellect, and a pure life. . . He was a man of great learning and broad observation, of genial manner and of the highest personal character. Few men have ever led a more spotless life."*

The journal then went on to commend his great impact on early Colorado:

> *"In the early days, when the influence of such men was needed, he was always a recognized power in molding the life of the [Colorado] territory, and in business, and in legislation and in politics and in society his example and his personal influence were always elevating. Much of the result of his early work has lived to see realized in the Denver and Colorado of to-day."*

Rocky Mountain News spoke similarly of Belden's influence, saying:

> *"While almost unknown to the Denver of today,*
> *Judge Belden was a prominent figure in the early territorial days."*

With this statement, the newspaper also indicated that even mere months after his death, people had already almost forgotten D.D. Belden.

A substantial tribute to Belden compiled in the months following his death, titled *In Memoriam D. D. Belden*, provides countless accounts of his good nature. One report says:

> *"Old and young, long-time friends and new acquaintances, learned men and little children, all had a warm place in their hearts for the man who was always tender, always just, and always overflowing with kindness to all."*

Another states:

"One of the speakers at the funeral said of him, "He had a passion for truth and justice." Could there be a higher tribute to the moral worth of any man? To have a "passion for truth" is better than to wield a sceptre or wear a crown!"

However, a further passage points out the unfortunate reality of what Belden dedicated much of his life to doing because of his "passion for truth":

"The circumstances of his life and occupation in this western country, caused him to spend the best years and energies of his life in combatting fraud, dishonesty, and wrong doing."

Although not entirely true, another section describes how even Belden's political opponents always acknowledged his character:

"They always admitted that he was absolutely incorruptible, and his influence ever on the side of law, order, religion, education and the best interests of the community, entirely irrespective of his own personal advantage."

On another note, a tribute written to him by a friend in California, Dr. Alida C. Avery, gives a glowing account of his unusual treatment of women at the time:

"The cordial comradeship that he gave women, always and everywhere, whether in matters industrial, mental, moral or spiritual, in Church or in State, was to me a vital incentive to be honest, open-minded and aspiring, worthy of the confidence given by his rare nobility of nature."

In Memoriam also gives considerable insight into D.D. Belden's deep spirituality and strong Christian faith. In a transcript of Rev. W.G.M. Stone's speech from his funeral, it is said:

"To him another life was more than mere belief.
It was something as sure as the coming morn, as certain as a to-morrow."

Dr. A.B. Hyde added to this point by comparing Belden's way of life to the Bible verse Micah 6:8:

"But how can we remember him other than the one who dealt justly, who loved mercy, and who walked humbly with the Lord his God?"

In a letter to Mrs. Belden regarding the loss of her husband, Jas. W. Van Nostrand provides another biblical comparison to the way Belden lived, referencing Ecclesiastes 9:10:

"The motto of his life seems to have been
'Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it with diligence.' "

In another passage from *In Memoriam*, Belden's ideal for worldwide spirituality was record-

ed. He wished that all people would be enlightened in the ways of God, and said in one of his writings:

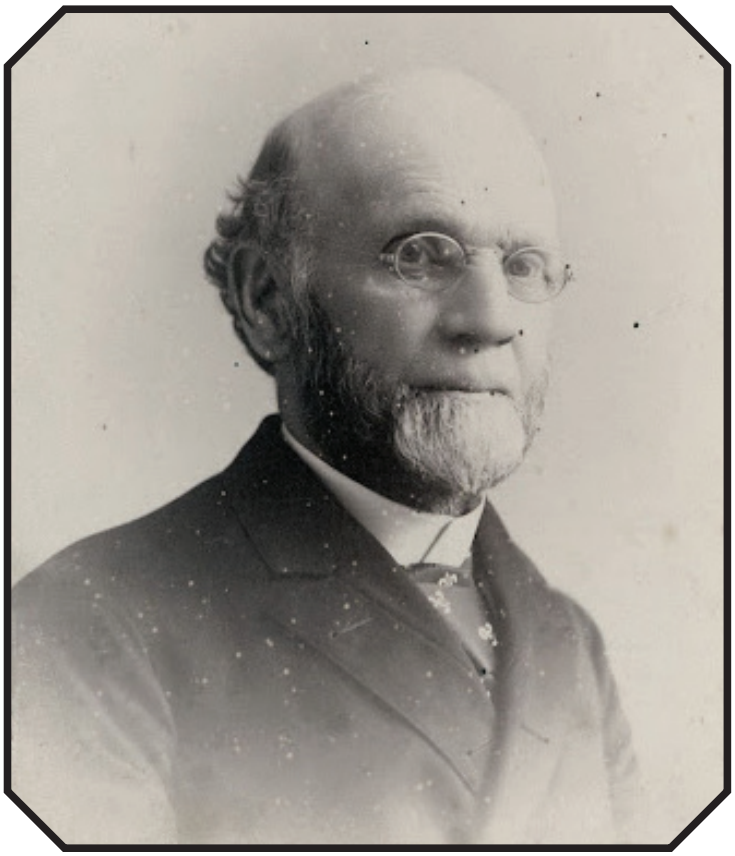
> *"Man should be reminded of his sonship; should be told what he is heir to; and be taught the value of a human soul destined to outlive the sun, and then he will scarcely stoop to sin."*

With this, D.D. Belden was remembered by his peers as a standard for how one was to live out their faith in God.

(2022) D.D. Belden's gravestone in Riverside Cemetery as seen present day. *Courtesy of Pamela M. Belden*

Emily Belden did outlive her husband by a few years, passing away on March 13, 1902. The high standing and irreplaceability of both her and Judge Belden was recognized in an obituary written shortly after her passing:

"In a former century ships nearing Sandy Hook took as a landmark two noble oaks on the Jersey shore, and by them steered safely into lower New York harbor. When these were gone the mariner was at such a loss that the government reared in their place a beacon for his guidance. Like these oaks were for 40 years Judge and Mrs. Belden in Denver. Their integrity and charity, their intelligence and discretion, their sympathy with all excellence made them a help directly to many and indirectly to all."



(1897) The only known photo of D.D. Belden from his time in Colorado, likely taken shortly before his death. *History Colorado.*

Both Emily and David Douglas Belden were buried in the Riverside Cemetery in Denver alongside their son Charlie, where they remain to this very day.

The impact of D.D. Belden was unlike any other across Eagle County or Colorado. However, his legacy can be aptly described by a quote from the book *Colorado A History of the Centennial State:*

> *"Success on the frontier came to those with visionary minds, to those who could see towns and railroads where none existed. A fluid society offered rewards for the versatile entrepreneur who could edit a newspaper one month, organize a bank the next, and maneuver for political office before the year was out. Successful businesspeople, journalists, and politicians exuded self-confidence and a willingness to promote the territory. They anticipated growth and recruited others to share their expectations and risks."*

In accordance with this, Belden's prowess throughout his time in Colorado can be attributed to his unique adaptability to seemingly any profession and his innate desire to advance the standing of everything he saw around him. He was truly a trailblazer and it is a tragedy for all of Colorado that the man was almost forgotten.

Final Thoughts from the Author

In all of my research and writing for this project, one thing became abundantly clear to me: Belden, neither the place nor the man, should ever have been forgotten by the people of Eagle County and Colorado.

Belden the place suffered a terrible fate after it fell out of use. In a way it's a ghost town twice over; it has been completely abandoned, and completely forgotten. Its counterpart Gilman is incomparably more well-known simply because you can see it. Every time you drive up Highway 24 it commands your attention, and there's almost no way to not know it's there. Belden on the other hand, even though it was far more important to the actual function of the Eagle Mine, is invisible. You can only catch a glimpse of it by trespassing or by going on a special guided tour, meaning it's essentially inaccessible to the public. Because of this, all of what it is and the centuries of history that formed it are just gone. This fact alone is why I wrote such an in-depth account of Belden's past; absolutely nothing else exists that documents it.

You may have realized in reading the history of Belden that it stops in a strange, seemingly abrupt place; 1947. This was deliberate. Right around 1947, the buildings in Belden were completed, and they remained the same for the next three decades up until the Eagle Mine was abandoned. Several people have already written about the history of Gilman and the Eagle Mine from the mid-1900s to its end, as well as the resulting environmental disaster and the following cleanup. Because I'd be rewriting information that's already easily available, as well as the fact that Belden didn't change after it, I decided to end the history at 1947.

In much the same way as the place named in his honor, D.D. Belden was lost to time, and his importance overlooked. Even just in Eagle County, he was the first commissioner, easily one of the most important positions in a brand new area like ours was in 1883, and no one today knows who he is. In a much broader sense, Belden was the gold standard for pioneers. He was inventive, adaptable, honest in his dealings, and genuinely desired the progression of the places he lived in outside of self-interest. He was also written about time and time again as a loving, empathetic man who truly cared about everyone around him. As mentioned, he wasn't without his flaws, but as far as early pioneers go, he was the best of the best. But somehow even with this, he was still forgotten.

Toward the very end of my research, I finally figured out why. D.D. Belden simply didn't care about being remembered. Belden was so intensely humble a man that he felt as though fame that would outlive him was beneath him, and pursuing it was frivolous. While his peers spent money to get things named after them and to be written in the history books, he did no such thing. Just for the sake of argument, let's take Walter S. Cheesman and George W. Clayton, who I've already extensively talked about. Cheesman funded Cheesman Park and Cheesman Reservoir, both of which act as physical monuments to his importance. Clayton funded the Clayton School for Boys, which does the same. D.D. Belden however, didn't do anything of the sort. The only direct monument to him is a cluster of abandoned buildings at the bottom of an inaccessible canyon which he didn't even try to get his name on. Because of this, it's so much easier to forget him than other men of similar standing at the time. Although according to everything written about him, Belden couldn't care less. The final stanza of a tribute poem from *In Memoriam* written by his close friend Alexander McLeod sums up the situation perfectly:

"Peace to his ashes! Joy be to his soul
Bravely he suffered, manfully he wrought,
And though on history's page and fame's proud roll
In vain his labors and his name be sought,
In this, unvexed, he'll share the common lot."

With this, even though Belden didn't personally care to be remembered in history, he rightly deserves his spot as both a titan of early Eagle County and of early Colorado.

One final item of note regarding D.D. Belden is that to the best of my knowledge, I haven't even recorded his full story. The man was involved in a ridiculous number of ventures throughout his lifetime, spanning multiple states and dozens of years, making information about him scattered and hard to find. I can say with reasonable certainty that I have a full picture of his endeavors in Colorado, but of other states, I can not say the same. It is highly likely that buried deep within the newspaper archives of a different state lie multiple stories about Belden that I was simply unable to find. That's part of the fun though, anyone could rediscover a part of his life that's been lost for over a century and bring it back to light.

On another note, this project was done in collaboration with the Eagle County Historical Society and was funded by their Charley Peterson Research Fund, which is a grant that funds research projects surrounding Eagle County history. If you've read through my entire paper and made it this far, I'd imagine you have an interest in the local history of our valley, and I want to encourage you to apply for the grant and make a project of your own. For anything you can imagine in the history of Eagle County, the information is out there. It all exists, deep within archives, newspaper collections, and old books. All that it lacks is passionate people to dig it up and share it with the world. If you thought that this project was intriguing, I urge you to be the person to make the next one. There is so much lost history right beneath our feet and all it takes to recover it is people who care.

To conclude, I'd like to express my gratitude toward everyone who contributed to this project in even the tiniest way. To name a few, thank you to Steve, Kathy, Conrad, Jeremy, Diane, Jarrett, Nick, and Jaci. I certainly could not have completed this all on my own, and I truly appreciate the help.

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