



This is the Wells Fargo Express in Virginia City, probably in the 1860s. Gold mixed with high quality silver ore was recovered in quantities large enough to catch the eye of President Abe Lincoln. He needed the gold and silver to keep the Union solvent during the Civil War. On October 31, 1864, Lincoln made Nevada a state although it did not contain enough people to constitutionally authorize statehood.

Chapter 4: Storey County - Virginia City, Gold Hill and vicinity.

The history of this county is, to some extent, the history of the whole State. It was here that the mines were discovered; here they developed into the wonderful proportions that revolutionized all previous values, and sent trade and manufactures into new channels, built new cities, and sent new millionaires into the world. Though apparently insignificant and unknown

The business men in some localities place their signs upon the tops of their buildings that they may be seen by those occupying a higher position in the world.



Caroline M. Nichols Churchill, 1874



Our road yesterday was pretty much the same. While staying here, a waggon drawn with 4 horses, and with others to relieve them, passed by us. It belonged to a merchant that had in the summer taken some goods to be disposed of in Utah, whom managed, as he told some of the brethren, to make a pretty good business of it. He carried passengers also, of which he had 3, now returning from the Washoe Diggings, having made very good time of it. One of them had a nugget upwards of 1 lb. weight, and numerous smaller ones.

William Ajax, 1861-2



Six Mile Canyon from Virginia City, 1860s

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men became fabulously rich and noted, we shall see as our history progresses, that energy and judgment, here as elsewhere, soon asserted their superior values, and gave to their fortunate possessors the control of the great bonanzas. Here, as in all countries and in all times, the presence of great wealth drew together, not only the energetic men of business, but also the criminal and abandoned classes, those who fasten themselves on society, and gather a large share of the produces of the industrious. Gamblers, thieves, swindlers, bummers and prostitutes—all claimed a share of the silver mountain, and, though such people hardly ever retain for any length of time their ill-gotten gains, they manage, somehow, to handle a great share of the money.

DISCOVERY OF THE COMSTOCK LODGE. The lode was found in 1859, and a small portion of the community were soon aware of the fact that an important discovery had been made. The few sacks of ores that were shipped to San Francisco were like the few samples of gold that found their way East, which only indicated the vast possibilities of the country. Silver ore, that would assay forty to eighty per cent, in the shape of blue clay, had been trodden under foot, washed away, sluiced out, and gotten rid of in the easiest way possible. It was said there

were mountains of it. Previous to this California had had many excitements. Gold Lake, Gold Bluff, Kern River, Frazer River, White Mountain, and others had all drawn away their thousands and sent them back disappointed; but in those instances gold, that was only found in small quantities, was the object sought. The new discoveries were silver ores. Some who visited the new mines reported, on their return, that more millions were in sight at Gold Hill and Virginia than California had yet produced. All the stories of the fabulous wealth that Spain drew from South America and Mexico came to mind; of Spanish galleons sunk with the weight of silver on board; of the solid altars and crucifixes of silver; of the hundreds of vessels with rich cargoes captured by the buccaneers; of cities plundered of their vast wealth; of the burial of the piles of money in many places along the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, and on lonely islands. The awkward coinage of the Mexican and South American money bore evidence of the rude age, when half-savage miners boiled their frijoles in silver kettles. A new Mexico, a new Peru, was found just over the Sierra Nevada, and the whole country was aroused. As soon as the melting of the snow permitted, and even before, a great multitude set out for the silver land, some on foot, and some with pack-mules.

Gold Hill City, 1860s



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Immense freight-wagons, with ponderous wheels and axles, heavily laboring under prodigious loads of ore for the mills, or groaning with piles of merchandise in boxes, bales, bags, and crates, block the narrow streets. Powerful teams of horses, mules, or oxen, numbering from eight to sixteen animals to each wagon, make frantic efforts to drag these land schooners over the ruts, and up the sudden rises, or through the sinks of this rut-smitten, ever-rising, ever-sinking city. A pitiable sight it is to see them! Smoking hot, reeking with sweat, dripping with liquified dust, they pull, jerk, groan, fall back, and dash forward, tumble down, kick, plunge, and bite; then buckle to it again, under the gaffing lash; and so live and so struggle these poor beasts, for their pittance of barley and hay, till they drop down dead.



J. Ross Browne, 1871