

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE TRI-STATE DISTRICT

By A. M. Gibson*

A scrutiny of mining camps in the Trans-Mississippi West yields patterns of amazing similarity. Whether a lead-mining camp in the southwestern Missouri Ozarks, silver workings in the alpine region of the Colorado Rockies, or the Sacramento-gold camps of California, each was characterized by a recurring sequence of trends—social, intellectual, and economic. While much literature has been produced interpreting these trends for the mineral communities of the Far West, little if any attention has been given to the camps of the Tri-State District, even though its mines have sustained production for well over a century, claiming a yield of one and one-half billion dollars worth of mineral, and achieving recognition as the world's leading producer of lead and zinc.¹

Embracing Jasper and Newton counties in Missouri, Cherokee County, Kansas, and Ottawa County, Oklahoma, this mineralized region supported substantial mining camps before the Great California Strike, and was able to supply a sizeable number of skilled prospectors and miners for the California operations. Throughout the Tri-State District, the same social, intellectual and economic trends evident in the general Western mining camp frame of reference can be identified. The evolution from entrepreneur to wage earner status for the miner-pro prospector, absorption of small, independent holdings by mining syndicates supported by outside capital, jerry-built shack dwellings and business establishments, a neglect of the social graces, disdain for learning, and contempt for religion, plus a riotous ribald pattern of living, making mining camps the epitome of bacchanalian activities, characterize the camps of the Tri-State just as they do for the Sacramento, Virginia City, and Cripple Creek regions. Of added significance for the Tri-State camps is the sharp contrast their quickened pulse and general turbulence supplies to the staid and conservative agrarian society found on their periphery.

* Material for portions of this paper was gathered, or corroborated, under the auspices of a research travel grant furnished by the Faculty Research Committee, University of Oklahoma. Grateful acknowledgment is made for this consideration, by the author, A. M. Gibson, Head, Division of Manuscripts and Phillips Collection, University of Oklahoma Library, and Assistant Professor of History.—Ed.

¹A. J. Martin, *Summarized Statistics of Production of Lead and Zinc in the Tri-State Mining District*, U. S. Bureau of Mines Information Circular No. 7583 (Washington, 1946).

Life in the mining camps of the Tri-State District ran the gamut of raw human experience, from the exciting, glamorous stampede of miners with the electrifying news of a strike and the establishment of a new camp, to the deadly despair of finding lean ore and wasting a grubstake. In the early camps, miners worked a nine to ten hour day, six days a week and took Sunday off. While some farmed, gardened, and cared for livestock in their free time, others hunted and fished in the streams and timberland near the mines. Many patronized the abundant resources for ribald entertainment supplied by the various camps. According to Joel Livingston, Joplin, the leading camp for the district, had in 1875:³

Seventy-five saloons open both day and night and in most of them a full orchestra gave free concerts every night and in most a matinee Wednesday and Sunday afternoons. The following are names of some of the popular bars: Healthwood Bar, Board of Trade, and the Steamboat Saloon, the Golden Gate, Miners Drift, Ballock and Bouchers, the Bon Ton, the Palace, and the Brick Hotel Bar. One of the popular places was Blackwell's Bar and there something new and exciting was always pulled off. In November, 1875, Mr. Blackwell arranged for the entertainment of his patrons a fight between a Cinnamon Bear which was brought up from Arkansas and six blooded bull-dogs. One thousand two hundred people witnessed the fight which was won by the bear.

And a local miner poet added that:⁴ "Suez was still east of us and there were no Ten Commandments for way down yonder in Southwest Missouri, where women drink and curse like fury; where the barkeepers sell the meanest liquor which makes a white man sick and sicker, where the tin horns rob you a little quicker, that's where Joplin is."

While the consumption of whiskey in the camps must have been considerable, moderation was encouraged, since, as the Missouri Labor Commissioner noted in 1887, miners who drank to excess found it difficult to secure backing for a grubstake if working on their own, or to gain employment if hired out by the day. He added that in the hiring of workmen, married men received preference over single men.⁴

Miners showed considerable interest in baseball and boxing. A large portion of the space in early issues of the *Joplin Globe*, *Joplin News Herald*, *Granby Miner*, and *Picker King Jack* was devoted to coverage of athletic events. The report of an unusual Granby baseball game was chronicled as "The

³ Joel T. Livingston, *A History of Jasper County and Its People* (Chicago, 1912), I, 175.

⁴ *Joplin Globe*, March 13, 1949.

⁴ Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Ninth Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Missouri, 1887* (Jefferson City, 1887), 225.

Granby Daisy Cutters played the Neosho Club and were defeated by a score of 27 to 64. The material of the Daisy Cutters is superb, and relying on sheer nerve, they neglected their practice."² Another diversion among miners was to "group together, exchange experiences, and stories, and this if not watched is done on company time, and at great cost to labor efficiency."³

One of the favorite miner pastimes was to celebrate a new strike. When a prospector made a discovery of ore, the men of the camp turned out to share the glad tidings. Women and children vacated the streets as they were "pretty rough sometimes." The celebration started with a single file parade of the miners, winding snakelike in and out of stores and saloons and back onto the street, the participants "singing, whooping, holding their picks . . . and shovels high, ringing cowbells and dragging tin cans." Some carried burning torches. Along the course of the parade, the miners "bought candy, cigars . . . and plenty of whiskey."⁴

The highlight of the week's activities for the miners and their families was Saturday night. According to Walter Williams:⁵

Saturday night in Joplin is a sight worth going miles to see. All the banks of the city are kept open from 7 until 2, and over \$100,000 is paid out in several counting rooms. Then the operators receive pay for the week's turnin, and miners and other laborers are paid their week's wages. From 8 o'clock until midnight, the stores are crowded with people making purchases, paying the week's grocery bill, laying in supplies for next week, and swapping experiences. Fully one-fourth of the week's business in the stores is transacted on Saturday night.

Lane Carter, a mining engineer from Chicago, was another observer impressed by local social behavior of the miners. "On Saturday nights or Sundays," he reported, "if one walks through the crowded streets of Joplin and mingles among the miners, one will hear little foreign talk. Plain 'United States' interspersed with a few emphatic 'cuss words' of Cornish origin is the language of the men."⁶

Creation of law and order was a serious problem in the early history of the Tri-State camps. After a few months of turbulence, however, the "respectable people" were able to

² *Granby Miner*, October 4, 1873.

³ Charles W. Burgess, "Mining Costs in the Missouri-Kansas District," *Mining and Engineering World*, XXXVIII (April, 1913), 304.

⁴ Mabel H. Draper, *Though Long the Trail* (New York, 1946), 171.

⁵ Walter Williams, *The State of Missouri* (Columbia, 1904), 294.

⁶ Lane Carter, "Economic Conditions in the Joplin District," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, XC (October 15, 1913), 752.

gain an upper hand, a miner's code was adopted for each camp, the more violent crimes were brought under control, and the "reign of terror" abated.¹⁰ In each camp, municipal government was finally established, its functions carried on by public officers, and the citizens were represented through a city council. Picher, Oklahoma was an exception. Modern Picher has municipal government, but for most of its existence, it had, according to the *Daily Oklahoman* a "feudal organization":¹¹

The company (Eagle Picher) employs a deputy sheriff who has authority to enforce regulations where needed. The social organization is rather feudal in character. The whole town of Picher is built on land leased by the company. As the company's representative, Mr. Bandelar is sort of an overlord, a court from whose judgment there is no appeal. He administers the law of the land. Community differences which inevitably arise are brought to him for adjudication when the litigants are unable to effect a settlement themselves. The company control of the land vests its representative with the power to make his judgments binding. Anyone who refuses to accept the court findings can be dispossessed of his home. Rarely is this extreme penalty imposed. Chief offense against which there is no compromise is infraction of the bone dry law. Eviction is promptly decreed against the resident who is caught bootlegging. The consequence is that booze has practically been eradicated from the camp. When the town was real young it had a gambling den called the "Red Apple." Rostets and fare were part of all camps and Picher was no exception. But prospectors and single men gradually were displaced by family men and the "Red Apple" has gone and not even the core is left.

Like prospectors and miners in other Western camps, the workmen in the Tri-State showed little interest in substantial homes and the amenities of life. While labor and sanitation inspectors lamented the hovels that comprised the mining camps, apparently the miners were satisfied. From the beginning, the workers seemed to be in an eternal hurry. They rushed in to prospect so as to strike ore as soon as possible. Promoters hastened to develop the region quickly. When miners ceased being operators and became day workers, they were in a hurry to get to their jobs so as to earn the good wages paid, especially if they were shovelers. One observer called this condition the "Joplin Colic."¹² Probably, in the beginning the neglect of adequate housing was due to haste. The land system undoubtedly made a contribution too. Land and royalty companies controlled most of the mining land, either in fee or lease.

¹⁰ F. A. North, *The History of Jasper County, Missouri* (Des Moines, 1883), 396.

¹¹ *Daily Oklahoman*, August 12, 1917.

¹² Garland C. Broadhead, "Southwest Missouri Lead Interests," *Engineering and Mining Journal* (February, 1883), 73.

In the early days, poor transportation facilities made it necessary for the miner to live as close as possible to his diggings. The land was divided into mining plots and leased to miners. They could also lease lots for home building purposes. At Granby, for example, the miners were allowed to build dwellings and fence a garden plot free of charge on company land.¹³ The Rex Mining Company permitted miner lessees to build homes near their mining leases on its Joplin Thousand Acre Tract.¹⁴ Needless to say, these homes were poorly constructed. In their rush to get prospects underway, the miners gave little attention to comfort and sanitation. The important thing was to have minimum shelter available. Many of the miners were from the nearby Ozark hill country, and were accustomed to little better than a log shanty. Also, since most early dwellings were on mining land and largely undermined, there was less incentive to build a better home. The chief interest was to locate as close to the diggings as possible.¹⁵

The company town, complete with stereotyped dwellings, company store, and scrip, so common in the Western mining fields, failed to develop in the Tri-State District. The closest to this was an enterprise undertaken by the Missouri Lead and Zinc Company near Joplin. This company divided its 1,300 acres of mining land into prospect plots, laid out a residential district, and erected 350 miners' homes. A self-sufficient community, complete with company lumber yard, blacksmith shop, and store were added to meet miner needs. But whether mining on their own or working for wages, the miners were paid in cash.¹⁶ In modern times, Picher, Oklahoma, most approximates a company town. In 1951, because the town was extensively undermined, a part of the business district was in danger of caving. The Eagle Picher Company granted financial assistance to businessmen in moving buildings and improvements to a safe location.¹⁷

The Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics noted substandard housing in 1889 as one of the big problems in the district. Its report lamented that this was needlessly so since wages were good, but "the trouble is," concluded the Bureau,

¹³ Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Elementary Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Missouri, 1889* (Jefferson City, 1889), 378-379.

¹⁴ John R. Hollibaugh, *The Lead and Zinc Mining Industry of Southwest Missouri and Southeast Kansas* (New York, 1895), 13.

¹⁵ J. B. Rhyne, *Social and Community Problems of Oklahoma* (Cathie, 1929), 31.

¹⁶ "The Missouri Lead and Zinc Company's Plant," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, LXIX (June 2, 1900), 648.

¹⁷ *Picher Tri-State Tribune*, December 21, 1951.

"the savings which could certainly buy a comfortable home are dumped into holes in the ground" through prospecting for new deposits.¹⁸

Dr. Anthony J. Lanza of the U.S. Department of Public Health, made a house-to-house visit through the district in 1914 exploring housing and sanitary conditions. He noted that:¹⁹

Generally speaking, among miners . . . home conditions are fair to good . . . those living in the outskirts of towns, or on mining land between towns, were bad. Taken all in all when wages of the miners in Southwest Missouri are considered, home conditions are far below par so far as sanitation and comfort are concerned. The situation in this respect is remarkable, because it is so needlessly bad. The miners made \$3.50 to \$5.00 per day, and even more at times, and they do not migrate to the extent observed in other mining communities. The chief obstacles in the way of improvement are a failure to appreciate better living conditions, and possibly to a lesser extent, the fact that many families live on mining land upon which nothing but temporary shacks can be built.

Lanza visited a total of 694 homes in his survey and noted that most of them were one, two, and three room "shacks." On the state of cleanliness in these dwellings he recorded that 317 were good 318 fair, and 159 were classified as bad.²⁰ Lanza found the water and sanitation facilities objectionable too.²¹

The water supply of a great number of homes is rather unique. Water of good quality is obtained from deep wells, and is peddled around the district in water wagons and sold by the barrel wherever there are no water pipes. Wells are scarce, and in the majority of the homes the water barrel suffices for cooking and personal needs The outhouses are wretched, a feature in which south-western Missouri resembles a great part of the rural communities of the United States. In 689 premises there were 844 insanitary privies, which consisted of the simplest kind of a box structure over a shallow pit dug in the ground. There were sewer connections in 38 premises. In view of the prevalence of filthy privies all over that part of the country, the scarcity of wells is fortunate, and undoubtedly the fact that water is peddled from a pure source is the greatest factor in preventing wide-spread typhoid fever and other intestinal disorders In none of these homes was there a bathtub or bathing facilities other than could be obtained from a pan of water on the kitchen floor. In 281 premises there were 82 cases of tuberculosis and 120 cases of miners' consumption.

During the Department of Labor Conference on Working and Housing Conditions, held at Joplin in 1940, it was noted by Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins that miner housing

¹⁸ *Eleventh Annual Report*, 337.

¹⁹ Anthony J. Lanza, *Miners' Consumption—A Study of 433 Cases of the Disease Among Zinc Miners in Southwest Missouri*, U.S. Public Health Service Bulletin No. 85 (Washington, 1917), 337.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

was still largely substandard.²² By traveling around the fringes of Joplin, Galena, and Picher, one can still observe the remains of "mining slums."

Typical mining camp attitudes toward religion were registered in the Tri-State District. There were however, sufficient church-goers present in the early days to show in the religious censuses. These reveal that the region was dominantly Protestant, with a wide range of faiths represented. Also, it is evident from the comparative statistics derived from the contrast of Tri-State counties with agrarian counties of similar size population-wise and situated on the mining periphery, that the mining counties were much less interested in religious affiliation than their population counterparts. In relation to total population, the religious population for the peripheral counties amounted to about thirty-two per cent while the mining counties could show only about fifteen per cent.

This undoubtedly reflects the rough, boisterous reckless attitudes characteristic of mining camps. What the statistics do not show was the remarkable independence of doctrinal view and fundamentalism exhibited by local congregations, even those associated with national denomination groups with a reputation for liberalism in doctrine and anti-fundamentalism. Among the Protestants, the Baptists were the most numerous, followed in order by the Disciples of Christ, Methodists, and Presbyterians.²³

The inertia in Tri-State intellectual life reflects the traditional mining camp contempt for refinement and amenities. The mining counties, when compared to their neighboring agrarian counties, have shown, if not an indifference, at least a retardedness in providing adequate educational facilities. Some exceptions can be found, however, to this general rule. Mabel Draper, a Tri-State pioneer, recounted that once in a while the miners showed strong enthusiasm for educating their children. According to her, a Joplin town meeting 1872 resulted in the organization of a school board for the purpose of erecting a two-room schoolhouse. She added, "the money came in a hurry, one thousand dollars by popular subscription, and a few days later, right up the hill from us there were

²² Frances Perkins, *Conference on Health and Working Conditions in the Tri-State District*, U.S. Department of Labor (Washington, 1940), 35-36.

²³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Special Reports, Religious Bodies, 1906*, I (Washington, 1910) *Religious Bodies, 1916*, I (Washington, 1919), *Religious Bodies, 1926*, I (Washington, 1930), and *Religious Bodies of the United States, 1936*, I (Washington, 1941). These have served as sources for the data on Tri-State religious life.

piles of rocks from the nearby mines for the foundation and stacks of good smelling new lumber."²⁴

By 1876, Joplin had two grammar schools while Carthage boasted a \$36,000 school building with twelve teachers.²⁵ Miami, Neosho, Carthage, Galena, Webb City, and Joplin quite early established public libraries which contributed to the general intellectual uplift of the district. While the larger communities finally were able to furnish adequate educational facilities for their youth, the smaller mining settlements pulled the district average down. This was reflected in the district expenditure per pupil for education. Not only were the Tri-State counties low compared to most other counties in their respective states, but they were likewise considerably lower than their respective average state per capita expenditures. For example, in 1950 Cherokee County spent \$340.98 per pupil while the state of Kansas spent an average of \$297.31; Jasper County expended \$169.92 compared to Missouri's average of \$198.24 per pupil; and Oklahoma spent \$149.75 per capita compared to Ottawa County's \$133.97.²⁶ If the Tri-State was marginal in expenditures for education, it also manifested an unusually heavy pupil loss in the fourteen to eighteen year-old age group. The percentage of this age group attending school in Tri-State ran for several decades around fourteen per cent, while peripheral counties mustered twenty-five to thirty per cent.²⁷ This low percentage for the Tri-State undoubtedly is explained by the large number of male youths leaving high school to accept employment in the mines.

The Tri-State cultural heritage is saturated with the concept of individualism, a trait best illustrated by the "poor man's camp" tradition. To the layman, this means that a workman could engage in mining operations with only a small amount of capital, and if his prospect were fortunate, he stood a good chance of becoming wealthy. James Bruce, local mining engineer, noted the wide opportunities there as late as 1912 when he wrote. "The Tri-State District is a poor man's

²⁴ Draper, *Though Long the Trial*, 172.

²⁵ *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Jasper County, Missouri* (Joplin, 1876), 19.

²⁶ State and county per capita expenditure information extracted from Letter of Department of Education, State of Missouri, Jefferson City, October 8, 1953; Letter of State Board of Education, State of Oklahoma, Oklahoma City, October 15, 1953; and Letter of State Department of Education, State of Kansas, Topeka, October 25, 1953.

²⁷ Pupil loss statistics derived from U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States 1910, Population, II* (Washington, 1912), *Fourteenth Census of the United States 1920, Population, II* (Washington, 1922), and *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Population, II* (Washington, 1932).

camp and almost every miner who has spent any number of years in it . . . has at some time owned a prospect . . . and has made at least some attempt to organize a company to secure a lease, and try his luck at finding diggings.²⁸

The sociologist has a term, mobility, that is useful in characterizing this facet of Tri-State social life. Because of the "poor man's camp tradition," there has been considerable vertical mobility. That is, according to the Missouri Labor Commissioner in 1889, men working for a daily wage in the mines, customarily saved a portion of their earnings to grubstake them in prospecting.²⁹

There are few large companies employing men by the week or month. The rule is for each man to mine for himself, paying a stipulated royalty to the owner of the land. If within a few days the prospector finds nothing, he takes his rope and windlass and bucket to another spot of land, digs another hole and prospects again, keeping on thus until ore is discovered. Miners who work for the few companies in the country save their wages, and when a hundred or so of dollars have been accumulated, sink it into some prospecting shaft. One miner is now as poor as when he began, but is rich in anticipations. He will save his wages, expecting that at least the next prospecting will prove a bonanza. The successful few are heard of not once, but time and time again. The story of how one man digging a well for water in his back yard found, instead of water, a vein of ore from which he took out \$100,000, is told around almost a hundred thousand times. On the other hand, the thousand who spend their surplus wages in prospecting for lead, but who never find it, are rarely heard of. One man reported to the Bureau that he sunk two years' savings looking for ore, then returned to work for more money, but before saving enough to continue his prospecting, another man jumped his claim and going six inches deeper struck an exceedingly rich vein. Owing to this gambling spirit but few miners seem prosperous or own their own homes, although wages are fair.

The scattered nature of the deposits, and their relatively shallow depth enabled miners with limited funds to seek ore. The thousands of shallow test pits around the district attest to the hope and labor of miners to become wealthy. Wiley Britton, an early resident of the district, has estimated that "probably one out of fifty to one-hundred would not be too low an estimate" for those who struck it rich.³⁰

Those who made a rich strike moved from the wage earner to the operator class, and just as there was social movement upward in the social scale, based on economic success, so was there a similar movement back to the wage earner class if

²⁸ James L. Bruce, "Ore Dressing in the Joplin District," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, XCIII (February 24, 1912), 405.

²⁹ *Electric Annual Report*, 336-33.

³⁰ Wiley Britton, *Pioneer Life in Southwestern Missouri* (Kansas City, 1929), 19.

the prospect did not produce. Unwise investments in new prospects, or careless spending, proved the undoing of many a successful miner.³¹ The word "miner" is anomalous in the Tri-State District and produces a problem in semantics for the researcher. It meant both one who worked for wages as well as an operator who hired workmen. The operator worked, too, in the early days, and the names of operator associations reflect this, since there was the Southwest Missouri and Southeast Kansas Zinc Miners Association. This group consisted of mine owners seeking through concerted action better markets and investors in district mines.³² Only after 1900 can one discern a more specialized use of the word "miner." Thereafter, it meant an employee working for a daily wage, and "operator" came to be used as a designation for the mine owner.

In 1889, the Missouri Labor Commissioner made a study of district economic conditions, and he found the "gambling spirit" of local miners toward prospecting, "dumping their savings into holes in the ground," a major cause of hardship and social problems. His investigation revealed several intimate glimpses into the homes of the miners, one of which follows:³³

PIT BOSS

Condition—Family of six; parents, two sons 23 and 21 years of age, and two daughters of 23 and 17; father is pit boss; gets \$2.50 per day; works 9 months in the year; father and son both prospect part of the year; cleared \$260 at prospecting last winter; youngest son helps the father; family occupy common box house of 3 rooms and kitchen built by father and married son; cost \$140; surrounded by small scrub-oak bushes; no fence, carry water from well 100 yards from house; walls of house unplastered and covered with newspapers; family have an air of intelligence, but house not neatly kept. Father has mined for 17 years; had no money when he started; has none now; belongs to Grand Army; father, son and two daughters all belong to Knights of Labor; younger daughter takes music lessons, paid for by younger son. Sample dinner: Hot biscuits, corn bread, butter, gravy, potatoes, coffee and buttermilk; everything cooked well. Have chickens, cow and calf. Daughter's wedding cost \$10.

While there was vertical mobility in the district, there was a general lack of mobility in terms of space until after 1920. That is, between 1880 and 1920, once people came into the Tri-State camps, they generally remained. In this period, the region not only held its own in terms of population, but

³¹ William R. and Mabel Draper, *Old Grubstake Days in Joplin* (Girard, 1946), 18-20.

³² "Mining News," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, XLIX (April 19, 1890), 454.

³³ *Eleventh Annual Report*, 330-346.

actually showed an increase.²⁴ This is explained by the geology of the region—extensive mineralization and its capacity to sustain commercial mining over a long period, plus climate and soils which enabled the miners to support themselves and their families during periods of metal price depressions and mine shutdowns.

In spite of the fact that the Tri-State District showed no loss of population as a region until 1920, there was considerable mobility in local mining towns. For example, strikes in the Galeus field drew miners from Joplin, and the Picher strike attracted people from all over the district. Anthony Lanza noted this intra-district migration in 1915, but he was impressed by the regional population stability. "In most mining camps there is considerable annual migration, but in the Joplin District, the miners are natives and previous to 1915, outsiders had not come in any large number."²⁵

Intra-district migration was lamented by the *Granby Miner* in 1873 as responsible for nearly depopulating Granby, since "many miners, naturally migratory, were deceived by the blowing of newspapers and went to Joplin."²⁶ The Missouri Labor Commissioner commented in 1889 that "Those who have lived here for several years and made it their home seem well contented, but the restless ones spend most of their time prospecting, become dissatisfied with the work, and go away for awhile, though they generally come back and commence prospecting again."²⁷

The fact that population has remained stable in the district through the years is explained by the abundant employment opportunities in the mines, supplying the means of support for miners and their families. Even in periods of national prosperity, however, the mines might be shut down for short periods due chiefly to sagging ore prices or a surplus of mineral in buyers' bins.

Such a situation in the mines of Arizona and Colorado would have set off a migration of workers to other sections. In the Tri-State District it was common, until around 1920, for the more thrifty workers to have a small farm or garden plot and a cow, a pig or two, and chickens. The wives and children generally took care of the livestock, and the miners farmed or gardened after a day's work in the mines and in

²⁴ U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Eighth Census of the United States: 1860 Population*, I (Washington, 1862), through *Seventeenth Census of the United States 1950. Population*, I (Washington, 1952).

²⁵ Lanza, *Miners Consumption*, 15.

²⁶ *Granby Miner*, October 11, 1873.

²⁷ *Eleventh Annual Report*, 379-389.

periods of unemployment. The women canned food, and the pigs were butchered and processed for winter's use. Until recently, the wooded sections around the mining camps furnished abundant wild life for food as well as fuel for cooking and heating. The many district streams, unless contaminated by mine water, supplied bass and channel catfish for the family larder.

No other mining region in the country has been more capable of sustaining its people than the Tri-State District. Until recent times, even during economic distress, a miner could support himself and his family. Of course, for those miners families living in camps like Picher, where the mines and tailing piles extended literally to their doorsteps, no such economic independence was possible, and in times of mine distress, these people suffered considerably.

Another reason why the population has remained fairly stable in the past is that whenever a depression set in, unemployed miners would lease ground in the shallow deposit fields and prospect. Most of them earned enough to support their families by gouging for ore with crude methods and equipment. In 1914, the *Engineering and Mining Journal* noted this tendency in attempting to explain "Why Joplin Does Not Languish"³⁸

When a miner is pushed out of work by a shutdown, he often helps develop new fields. He becomes a prospector and producer . . . when he loses his job. Often, miners are found in old diggins' working surface gouges and shallow lead deposits. Only a small outlay is required in capital . . . a hand windlass, a barrel sawed in half for tubs, a rope, a few strong hands, a few picks and shovels, and enterprise enough to rig up and dig a hole to the ore. He is generally able to get enough timber around the ground to crib up the shafts and provide sufficient timbering to hold the ground long enough to accomplish the work of getting the ore.

Even during the great depression following 1929, some of the more resourceful miners of the district, reported the *Journal*, sought to make some sort of a living by prospecting:³⁹

Back to the gouges is the slogan of the Tri-State District. There are 3,000 miners out of work. About 1,000 are operating small prospects over the district. Many are anxious to prospect for shallow deposits but lack the capital. Hand windlasses, horse holeters, buck rocks, hand ligs, and stuke boxes again are in vogue and this is furnishing a livelihood for many district miners.

The fact that many of the workers were recruited from the farms of the district furnishes another explanation of popu-

³⁸"Why Mining at Joplin Does Not Languish," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, XCVII (January 24, 1914), 793.

³⁹"Mining News," *Ibid.*, CXXXI (May 31, 1931), 434.

lation stability. Malcolm Ross wrote facetiously that the "Ozark hills are rich in hungry hillbillies," and he recounts that one operator claimed that "all you have to do to get fresh miners is to go out in the woods and blow a cowhorn."⁴² Whenever the mines were open, farmers' sons would go to the mines, and when operations ceased they returned to the rural areas. Also, as the mines have become more highly mechanized, requiring less workmen, many miners have been absorbed in other industries recently established in the district.

The history of Tri-State mining camps fits quite well into the Western mining frame of reference, with two possible exceptions. One anomaly is indicated by the foregoing description of stability of Tri-State population. The vicissitudes of mining, including an erratic ore market with frequent declines in metal prices, have resulted in the periodic closing of Western mines until the market quotations resume a profitable level. Regularly, workmen have evacuated the Western camps quickly in the face of a metal depression and have sought employment elsewhere. Mining camps became ghost towns overnight, largely because of their location in mountainous or desert areas, where even temporary subsistence by farming was impossible. The Tri-State, more favorably situated in terms of climate and soils, enabled the local miners to support themselves by farming until the mines reopened. Thus, the region was able to sustain its people and avoid the fluctuations of its more westerly counterparts.

The other exception to the Western mining frame of reference found in the Tri-State District concerns labor activity. Mining camps throughout the West have been highly receptive to labor agitators and organizers, and through the years comprised a bulwark of strength for the Western Federation of Labor and the I.W.W. Small cells of these organizations were established in the Tri-State and their agents sought to organize the entire district, but with little success. The miners of the Tri-State have displayed a remarkable independence toward union organizers. In the late 1930's, the C.I.O. accomplished some organization of district mine and smelter workers. The age-old indifference toward unionization returned in the 1940's. Ironically, Tri-State miners, with a national reputation for labor union inertia, have been recruited many times between 1885 and 1950 as strike breakers for the mines of the Far West.

Until recently, it was possible to escape the problems of mine unemployment in the Tri-State District. No longer,

⁴² Malcolm Ross, *Death of a Yale Man* (New York, 1939), 185.

however, is it as easy to gain security on an individual basis. One of the reasons the labor movement has been so slow in taking hold in the district is because the miner could take care of himself one way or another. It has become progressively more difficult as living costs and standards have increased, and unionization in the 1950's has developed in proportion to the Tri-State miner's growing inability to meet his own needs on an individual basis.