Poor Man's Fortune

Roll, Jarod

Published by The University of North Carolina Press

Roll, Jarod.

› For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/74161

🔍 For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2564293
CHAPTER 1
FINDING’S KEEPING

In the two decades before the Civil War, in the course of a market revolution that quickened national commerce and territorial expansion, Americans used metal in more ways and in greater quantities than they ever had before. They used iron for the engines, machines, and tools that shaped the new steam-powered economy. They used copper to make household items, roofing material, and sheathing for ships but also as wire to conduct electrical signals over the new telegraph system. By the late 1850s, they mixed copper with zinc to make brass for buttons, precision instruments, and the first metallic bullet cartridges. They used lead in paint, sheet glass, and water pipes to improve growing towns and cities and for ammunition in armed conflict against Native Americans, foreign powers, and ultimately, other Americans. Of course, they used gold and silver to pay for these things. Yet as this new age began, the American market craved more metal than domestic sources could deliver. The development of the nation’s industrial economy needed metal miners keen to take advantage of its insatiable demand.

Beginning in the 1840s, miners responded with conquests and discoveries that exploited ore deposits across the continent with unprecedented fervor. Most famously, the Argonauts, who went to California, mined more gold in the 1850s than the whole world had in the previous 150 years combined. In 1859, miners prospecting for gold in Utah Territory (present-day Nevada) struck the Comstock Lode, the nation’s first major silver mine. These prodigious supplies of gold and silver increased the world’s currency by 600 percent, which further stimulated demand for base metals. In 1860, the United States produced twenty times more pig iron than it had in 1840. On Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, where in 1845 European Americans took copper mines long worked by the dispossessed Ojibwe, miners produced over 7,300 tons of the reddish metal in 1860. In the 1850s in New Jersey, miners opened the continent’s first zinc mines. Even though Americans had not yet mastered the methods to smelt zinc, manufacturers used 726 tons of it in 1860. In most cases, white miners backed their claims with violence against Native peoples, Spanish speakers, and others deemed inferior. The expansion of metal mining during the market revolution exemplified the powerful
enticements of American capitalism and white assertions of dominance—and the consequential relationship between the two.\(^1\)

The early development of metal mining in southwest Missouri followed this pattern. In the 1840s, the first non-Natives to settle in Jasper and Newton Counties found deposits of galena, the most common mineral form of lead, on land taken from the Osage and Delaware peoples. In some cases, these settlers simply identified old Native mines; others were new discoveries. They developed small but profitable mines and smelters that soon attracted the attention of several hundred experienced lead miners, who in the mid-1850s rushed to this isolated region on the border of Indian and Kansas Territories. By 1860, they were producing one-fourth of all the lead used in the United States. However, compared to the miraculous possibilities of the gold rush, which by 1860 drew over 100,000 miners to the West with hopes of sudden riches, the mining of lead required a more patient and elaborate economic imagination. While gold sold for twenty dollars per ounce in the 1850s, 1,000 pounds of lead sold for just sixteen dollars. In order to make money from galena, then, miners needed to extract it by the ton. In an era without much machine help or dynamite, this required not only immense physical effort but also a substantial investment of time. Although we might speak of rushes, lead mining privileged the sober investment of hard work and the careful consideration of prices and costs, including the risk of physical injury or death, over a relatively long period. Why, we might ask, in the midst of multiplying opportunities to mine other, more immediately valuable metals, did some miners find the promise of lead so attractive?\(^2\)

In fact, despite promises of riches for the many, most American mining districts offered opportunities that proved more limited than initially claimed. Although small groups of working miners made most of the initial discoveries of gold, silver, and copper in this period, wealthy investors soon dominated these industries through companies that increasingly used large-scale, mechanized methods and a system of wage labor. The mining of iron ore had always been hierarchical in the United States, whether on Pennsylvania’s “iron plantations” or in the slave labor camps of Virginia. Adopting this general form, well-financed, large companies bought out or financed the most successful small miners. These new firms organized deeper mining in search of the lode, or main source of surface deposits. These shafts soon extended several hundred and sometimes over 1,000 feet down. Deep mining relied increasingly on machine power to pump water and hoist material to the surface. As big companies mechanized operations, they employed miners on a wage basis, usually hiring Americans or European immigrants but sometimes, especially in gold mining, Chinese workers. Individual wage
miners, if they had experience and skill, could make good money, about three dollars a day in western goldfields. In large base metal mines, such as those in Michigan, however, miners earned much less, only about $1.25 a day in 1860. Although both wage levels exceeded the average earnings of general laborers in the 1850s, employment with the large companies dominating California’s goldfields, Michigan’s copper belt, and Nevada’s Comstock Lode meant that miners answered to other men who pocketed all of the real wealth they produced. Despite the heady possibilities of the western rushes, the interests of most metal miners quickly narrowed to questions of wages and working conditions as the market revolution gave rise to a new form of capitalism defined by industrial consolidation, mechanization, and regimented hierarchies.³

The lead industry stood apart, continuing to offer opportunities for white men with little capital to work on an independent basis and to make money producing a valuable commodity with their own skilled labor. By the time of the Civil War, American lead mining was old. While Native Americans in the Upper Mississippi River valley had mined galena on a small scale for generations, French traders developed the first European-controlled lead mines in North America in 1720, at a site in the eastern Ozarks of Upper Louisiana, sixty miles southwest of St. Louis in present-day Missouri. The eastern Missouri field, redeveloped and expanded by Spanish and later American miners, produced most of the lead in North America for the next century. As demand for lead increased, French and American miners seized control of mines from the Sauk and Fox peoples near present-day Dubuque, Iowa, in the 1790s and along the Fever River (now the Galena River) in present-day Illinois and Wisconsin in the 1820s. Although these mines soon surpassed the output of the eastern Missouri field, all lead miners continued to use preindustrial methods little changed from the previous century. That was possible because geological formations had left shallow deposits of galena at depths that could be reached with hand and animal power. Meanwhile, these deposits were far enough west of major European settlements—often beyond the effective reach of any government—to privilege those miners willing to take the risks of claiming and developing them. The lack of close governance allowed lead miners considerable sway with successive regimes in negotiating and maintaining a generous legal code of access that, from 1720 into the 1850s, allowed them to lease or claim mineral rights in exchange for royalty payments equal to a portion, usually from 10 to 20 percent, of the total mineral they extracted. Some aspirants, French, Spanish, and American among them, experimented with the use of enslaved labor in all of these fields. Over time, however, free mining proved less costly and less legally cumbersome and came to predominate, especially once Cornish
miners began arriving in 1830. Free miners generally worked for themselves in small-scale operations, sometimes alone but often in small basic partnerships according to the leasehold terms, from which they could make far more money—from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars more a year—than most other white men who worked with their hands. They were confident in their claims, especially after American forces defeated Native efforts to re-take land in the 1832 Black Hawk War. By the 1840s, when farmers made the first discoveries of galena in southwest Missouri, miners working these older fields produced all of the lead that Americans needed and more, and made St. Louis, by virtue of its proximity on the Mississippi River, the western center of the lead industry.4

Surging domestic demand for lead in the 1850s destabilized the lead industry. Americans used more than double the amount they had in the decade before, creating powerful new incentives to exploit the galena in Jasper and Newton Counties. Miners went there looking to re-create the terms that governed lead production elsewhere. In return for the risk of investing their time, money, and labor in physically demanding and dangerous work, they gained claims with the potential for high rewards. That investment reflected confidence in their own skill and prerogatives as free miners, as well as a careful appraisal of market conditions. While some urban workers in the 1850s resisted wage labor and industrial discipline with republican critiques of base materialism, lead miners took advantage of the market revolution and the opportunities it created for them. They sought the economic independence and social status expected of white men. Neither soft-palmed speculators nor dependent wage hands, these miners staked a position that straddled the social and economic chasm being wrenched open by industrial capitalism.5

We do not know who first discovered galena in the southwest corner of Missouri. In 1819 the geologist and geographer Henry Rowe Schoolcraft found abandoned surface mines and a small smelting furnace along the banks of the James River, about sixty miles southeast of present-day Joplin. He attributed the rudimentary but apparently successful workings to the Osage people, who dominated the northern Ozarks into the eighteenth century. “The Indians have been in the habit of procuring lead for bullets at that place,” Schoolcraft wrote, “by smelting the ore in a kind of furnace, made by digging a pit in the ground.” The Osage took their knowledge of lead production with them, however, after losing their remaining claim to land within Missouri’s borders in 1825. The first white settlers who moved into the area in the 1830s came looking for fertile farmland and good water, not lead.
Local lore reported the occasional uncovering of shafts along area streams, but few farmers investigated the holes until the late 1840s, when a quick succession of discoveries of relatively shallow but rich deposits of galena sparked new commercial considerations.6

Settlers in Jasper and Newton Counties lived in isolated communities on rich land at the western edge of the contiguous United States. The first few arrived in 1831 when the federal government forced the last remaining Osage and Delaware people into Indian Territory. Around 2,000 families, over 8,400 people, followed during the next two decades, mainly from Kentucky, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Most established small farms along rivers and creeks. Some owned slaves but in small numbers. Only 123 slave owners and 454 enslaved people lived in the two counties in 1850. Nine slave owners held ten or more people; most owned three or fewer. Large-scale slavery did not pay so long as the new settlements lacked adequate means to transport agricultural products. No roads of any kind ran to St. Louis, the closest major market, nearly 300 miles away. Farmers could send goods overland to the Osage River, 100 miles north, and then by boat to the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. Wagon haulage was expensive, however, and painfully slow. Or they could ship downriver through Indian Territory to Memphis and New Orleans, but the route was long and dangerous. Instead, farmers produced mainly for subsistence but also for sale in the small regional market: wheat, corn, oat, sheep for wool and meat, and some tobacco.7

The first Americans who tried to make money from lead mining in the area were local farmers and merchants. According to most accounts, Thomas Shepherd and Simpson Oldham began mining galena from an outcropping along Shoal Creek in present-day Newton County in 1847. We do not know if they went looking for mineral, as many called galena, or found it by accident. In 1848 Amos Spurgeon discovered mineral while plowing on his farm three miles west of the Shepherd and Oldham mine. In the spring of 1849, David Campbell found a deposit on his uncle William Tingle’s land along Turkey Creek in Jasper County, sixteen miles to the northwest. John Cox, Tingle’s new neighbor, recognized the mineral as the same material his enslaved man had unearthed on the banks of Joplin Creek, a tributary of Turkey Creek. In 1850, Andrew McKee found galena a few miles north of Tingle at his homestead; in 1851 he discovered more along Center Creek, ten miles north of Cox’s land, apparently at the site of an old Osage surface mine. Of these settlers, it seems only Campbell had prior mining experience; local accounts stated that he soon gave up on lead, however, to go search for California gold. We know that Cox, Tingle, and Spurgeon were among the very first white farmers to settle in the area. Cox also ran a store and served as a
Map 2. The Tri-State district. Courtesy INCase, LLC.
local postmaster. In 1850, the census enumerator listed Tingle’s profession as “merchandizing” but reported no real estate of any value. McKee ran a store that supplied goods into Indian Territory, worked a small farm, and served as a county judge. No records indicate what work Shepherd and Oldham pursued, although they continued to mine. All of them knew the value of lead, at least as ammunition. With their commercial ties, Cox and Tingle would have known more about its marketability.

Their discoveries revealed a rare geological environment in Jasper and Newton Counties. Shoal, Turkey, and Center Creeks cut valleys across a rich field of surface ore fifteen miles wide and over twenty miles long. Here, where the Ozark uplands descend gradually onto the western prairie, ancient cataclysmic events in the earth left behind shallow, irregular pocket deposits of different mineral forms of lead and zinc, particularly galena (lead sulfide) and sphalerite (zinc sulfide), tossed in a disturbed formation of clay, fragmentary limestone, and conglomerate chert, a fine-grained, silica-rich sedimentary rock. Miners would come to call this shattered formation the “soft ground” because it rested, fifty to sixty feet in depth, on a substratum of solid limestone. Farmers first discovered the soft ground minerals near area streams because the fast-running waters had gradually eroded surface soils to uncover the harder, heavier rocks, among which galena predominated.

The production of lead from surface mines was relatively straightforward. After his discovery, Amos Spurgeon and his brother, John, worked a set of shallow pits, probably no more than twenty feet deep. As one man worked in the ground, the other hoisted the dislodged mineral to the surface with a rope and bucket. They could stop or start as opportunity allowed. Since lead melts at a relatively low temperature, 621.5°F, easily attainable by burning wood, the Spurgeons smelted the mineral themselves on a log-roasting furnace built into a hillside, like the Osage had. After washing the galena in a sluice, they placed it with a mix of wood chips onto a bed of burning logs in the furnace, a process known as charging. They then stoked the charge through an opening, called an eye, at the bottom of the slope. Once in the furnace, the carbon in the burned fuel combined with the sulfide in the galena to make sulfur dioxide gas, which dissipated in the open air, and molten lead oxide, which the miners drew from the eye into a clay pot. Although not pure lead, lead oxide was a common industrial form used in the production of glass and pigments. A local report estimated that by 1851 the Spurgeons had mined 113 tons of galena, from which their inefficient smelting methods still yielded 40 tons of pig lead worth more than $4,000.

A few settlers had their enslaved laborers do all or parts of the work. The young man John Cox owned did all of the mining on his land, a decision that
was notable enough that Cox’s neighbors called the mine “Nigger Diggings.” In five years this enslaved miner produced five tons of mineral. Cox’s neighbors Tingle and McKee likewise used slaves to produce pig lead, although records do not reveal who did the actual mining. Their mines, on either side of Turkey Creek, yielded a total of twenty-five tons of mineral in 1850. Tingle and McKee were more interested in marketing lead, however, and invested in a wood-fired smelter that became the hub of lead production in their neck of Jasper County, soon dubbed “Leadville” by locals. They sold the smelted lead “in the small towns and in the Indian country on our western border.”

Most of these settlers aspired to be farmers, however, not miners or lead traders. Some used their lead earnings to buy and expand homesteads. Until 1848, few settlers in southwest Missouri possessed legal land titles. The federal government’s 1825 treaty with the Osage brought present-day Jasper and Newton Counties into Missouri as public land. Under the Land Act of 1820 and the Preemption Act of 1841, the white farmers who settled there established a right to purchase up to 160 acres for $1.25 per acre. By the mid-1840s only a few settlers in southwest Missouri had paid for their title deeds, mainly because they lacked cash but also because isolation and sparse settlement made official papers a low priority. In August 1848, not long after they began mining, Amos and John Spurgeon made the seventy-mile trip to the U.S. Land Office in Springfield to buy title to eighty acres each. Further mining allowed the brothers to add to their holdings, which they turned into successful farms. When the census enumerator listed them as “farmers” in 1860, they each claimed property worth more than $3,000. John Cox did likewise. He bought his first title, for forty acres, in January 1849 and continued to add to his holdings, but not his enslaved workforce, over the following decade until he was one of the richest farmers in Jasper County. Cox worked the land himself with his son and one or both of his slaves. In 1860 he claimed $12,000 in property, up substantially from $750 ten years before. Andrew McKee bought title to eighty-four acres of farm and mineral land on Turkey Creek in July 1852. McKee clearly envisioned a future as a farmer because he traded his preemption right to known mineral land along Center Creek in exchange for a wood frame for his new farmhouse. The real or potential profitability of the early mineral discoveries made other settlers keen to convert their preemption rights into title deeds in the years after 1848, whether or not their land contained mineral. Most, however, still bought land for its agricultural promise.

Unprecedented rates of economic growth in the 1850s sparked new demand for lead that would almost immediately challenge these agrarian priorities.
American use of lead increased from an average of 20,000 tons a year in the 1840s to over 40,000 tons a year in the 1850s. Much of this demand came from manufacturers in booming western cities, such as St. Louis, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Milwaukee, where new industries produced pipes, glass, and paint for residential and business construction. Miners in the Upper Mississippi and eastern Missouri fields could not meet their needs. From producing an all-time high of 31,000 tons in 1847, these mines yielded diminishing returns. In 1852 American lead miners produced only 18,800 tons, the lowest total since 1840. In 1855 American manufacturers used 48,000 tons of lead, more than double what domestic mines produced. Prices for smelted lead soared, up from 3.30 cents per pound in 1845 to 4.60 cents per pound in 1850 and 5.75 cents per pound in 1855. Lead miners had never had such a good opportunity to make money or such strong incentives to look for new sources of mineral.13

The rudimentary mines of southwest Missouri soon attracted the attention of a motley group of frontier entrepreneurs with bigger ambitions. In 1850 Shepherd and Oldham partnered with George Moseley and his nephew William Moseley to develop their mine. Born in Kentucky, the Moseleys had only recently arrived in Newton County, George to run a store and William to start a law practice. William Moseley entertained grand ideas and liked to write about them. In September 1850 he wrote to the Western Journal, a St. Louis–based newspaper devoted to regional economic issues, describing his efforts to exploit “a recent discovery of very rich and valuable lead ore.” This was the first published account of successful mining in the area. Over the summer, Moseley announced, he and his uncle, who both lacked mining experience, had expanded two shafts on the Shepherd and Oldham claim. He explained that the “six hands” who worked the mines, each sixty feet deep, had produced “about 100,000 pounds of ore.” Moseley did not say who did the work or how they were paid. They might have been slaves hired out from local farmers. In the autumn, the partners, operating as Moseley, Oldham, and Company, built their own smelter, a Drummond-style furnace that used a horse-powered fan to circulate heat above and below a raised platform that held the wood and mineral charge. First developed in 1835 and used widely in eastern Missouri, the Drummond furnace captured more lead than did log furnaces with less fuel. The Moseleys apparently financed the operation themselves; an 1851 credit report did not mention any outstanding debts. According to the 1850 census, the pair owned $11,000 in real estate, as well as three enslaved women and one enslaved man, between them. In exchange for their investment, Shepherd and Oldham gave the Moseleys a share of the land.14
Moseley, Oldham, and Company seemed to enjoy bright prospects, as William Moseley explained in 1854 in a second letter to the *Western Journal*. Rising prices in the early 1850s had made it profitable to sell pig lead to buyers beyond southwest Missouri, although it was still too expensive and difficult to ship to St. Louis. In 1851, the company sold lead to New York and Boston buyers in New Orleans at the St. Louis price, 4.3 cents per pound, which took into account onward shipping costs. The company shipped this lead, worth forty-three dollars per 1,000 pounds, by water to New Orleans, first on flatboats through Indian Territory to Fort Smith, and then on steamboats along the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers. This method was profitable enough by 1852 to finance the construction of a water-powered blast furnace with a 70 percent recovery rate. The company smelted mineral from its own mines and mineral it bought from smaller operations nearby. In four years, Moseley figured that his firm smelted 825,000 pounds of galena that would have yielded around 500,000 pounds of pig lead worth more than $24,000 at prevailing market prices.15

Inspired by the Moseleys and rising lead prices, others began investing in larger, more efficient smelters with hopes that they could buy enough galena to make it pay. Between 1850 and 1854, the price of lead in St. Louis rose from 4.00 cents per pound to 6.19 cents per pound, a 55 percent increase. Tingle replaced his log furnace in Leadville with a Drummond. In 1853, William Harklerode built a similar blast furnace near Center Creek in Jasper County. But they all soon ran into trouble. Both Tingle and Harklerode struggled to stay in business. The Moseleys, meanwhile, were found with “heavy debts” in late 1853. With lead prices high, their collective misfortunes likely stemmed from short supplies of mineral. In 1854, G. C. Swallow, Missouri’s first state geologist, reported that smelters were raising the prices paid for galena to as high as twenty dollars per 1,000 pounds. For entrepreneurs such as the Moseleys, the decision to pay more for mineral suggests that smelting capacity had outpaced mine production and that there were not enough miners, enslaved or free, with the know-how to find more.16

Word of a new lead district in southwest Missouri, however, soon attracted experienced miners to the area. The first professional miners had arrived in late 1850 when Francis Reando and David Sunday, both of whom had mined in Washington County, Missouri, bought titles to public land along Turkey Creek. More followed from the eastern Missouri and Upper Mississippi districts. Although declining production in the older fields set them searching, these miners went to southwest Missouri to take advantage of the skyrocketing price of pig lead and competition between area smelters for mineral. According to Swallow, experienced miners “say they can make more money
in these mines, raising mineral at $20 per thousand, than they could in any other mines they have seen.” The first wave of skilled miners soon expanded the existing diggings. They did so without the benefit of a scientific geological survey. In fact, when Swallow arrived to conduct his first survey of Jasper and Newton Counties, he relied on “several experienced miners who have worked in the mines of Iowa and Wisconsin, and of the eastern counties of Missouri” to guide him. With area smelters weak and divided, the newcomers soon gained authority in the area’s nascent mining industry.\textsuperscript{17}

News of these developments attracted the attention of outside investors. Between November 1852 and April 1853, Ferdinand Kennett and John Casey bought 355 acres near known mineral deposits along Turkey and Center Creeks in Jasper County. Born in Kentucky in 1813, Kennett was wealthy and powerful. In 1846, along with his brother, Luther Kennett, and with James White, he formed the St. Louis Shot Tower Company, which controlled lead-smelting and processing facilities in St. Louis and nearby Herculaneum that turned galena into ammunition for federal soldiers stationed at Jefferson Barracks and for settlers embarking for the West. In 1850 Kennett owned fifteen slaves and real estate worth $84,500. Although not as wealthy as Kennett, the Irish-born Casey had developed and operated several lead mines in Washington County, Missouri, since the 1830s. The 1850 census listed him as a farmer with $50,000 in real estate and twelve slaves. He had served as the local postmaster and was also Kennett’s neighbor. Their investment in Jasper County eyed future needs. They did not immediately open this land to mining.\textsuperscript{18}

Kennett knew that a railroad might one day bring these mineral deposits within easier reach of St. Louis markets. After the state of Missouri chartered the proposed transcontinental Pacific Railroad Company in 1849, surveyors outlined two potential routes from St. Louis to Missouri’s western boundary: one going west to Kansas City along the thirty-ninth parallel and another going southwest toward Indian Territory to follow the thirty-fifth parallel. The company chose the northern route and began construction in St. Louis in July 1851. When the U.S. Congress gave Missouri a public land grant to facilitate internal improvements in 1852, the state used a share of the land to help the Pacific Railroad build a second line to follow the southwestern route, which became known as the Southwest Branch Railroad. The state granted the railroad alternating sections of land along the surveyed path from the new town of Pacific to Springfield and on to the state line with a right to preempt any settlers who occupied these sections. Ferdinand Kennett was well placed to take advantage of the plan. His brother, Luther,
was not only the mayor of St. Louis at the time but also a director of the Pacific Railroad. No one knew when the railroad would actually be built, but Ferdinand Kennett was convinced that once it was, the mines of southwest Missouri would become more valuable than ever. He bought land there in the weeks before the state legislature officially approved the deal.  

While investors like Kennett waited, miners went to work. They read topographical signs and surface rocks for clues as to what lay in the ground. With this knowledge, miners explored the area in the hopes of intersecting previously known deposits or making new discoveries. In 1853, William Foster, a Cornish miner who had recently arrived from eastern Missouri, struck a vein of galena on unclaimed land along Shoal Creek in Newton County, ten miles east of the Moseley mines. It was the richest discovery yet and more would follow. “There are a great number of shafts sunk in many places in this neighborhood,” Swallow reported. On Turkey Creek, he found five mines, including those operated by Sunday and Reando, which had produced 260,000 pounds of mineral. On Center Creek, miners worked six new mines that yielded over 400,000 pounds. “From what I could see of the veins and learn of the amount of mineral raised, and from the general satisfaction of the miners,” Swallow concluded, “I would judge that mining at the Center-Creek Diggings has been very profitable.”

These miners looked to replicate the generous terms that had governed their efforts in the older lead fields of the Mississippi Valley. On unclaimed public land, they assumed unfettered access. Where someone owned the land, they had to negotiate a mining lease, a straightforward proposition between white men. Under these leaseholds, Swallow reported, miners paid one-eighth of the total mineral they raised to the landowner. They were then free to sell the remainder to local smelters at the market rate, which in 1854 was twenty dollars per 1,000 pounds. Far riskier but also potentially far more remunerative than wage labor, this leasing system had governed lead mining in North America since the eighteenth century. The administrators of New Spain first granted leases in what became eastern Missouri as a means to encourage the renewed development of derelict mines originally opened by the French. Subsequent American miners, led by Moses Austin, continued the generous Spanish leasing system because it provided the cheapest, most effective means to encourage mine exploration in such a remote area. In 1807, the U.S. Congress adopted the same practice on public lands, which would cover most of the new lead discoveries in eastern Missouri and, beginning in the 1820s, in the Upper Mississippi field. Under the U.S. regime, miners could secure plots 300 yards square provided that they worked the
claim at least once every seven days and paid a 10 percent royalty. Isolation made government enforcement difficult, however; many miners avoided royalty payments.21

Although working on public land, lead miners in the old fields claimed entitlement to their diggings by virtue of the risks and effort required to extract the mineral. Their claims rested on the informal rule of “finding’s keeping.” The leasing system “favored individuals, families, and small companies,” according to a local historian, and created a culture of mining in which “miners were intensely interested in small claims,” often fiercely so. The system remained in place until 1847 when the federal government began selling public mineral lands in forty-acre lots. The government might have facilitated the consolidation of the lead-mining industry if the yields on those mineral lands had not unexpectedly and almost immediately collapsed. The miners who left the eastern Missouri and Upper Mississippi fields went looking not only for new places to mine lead but also for places to defend and sustain the proprietary claims that the leasing system made possible.22

Experienced miners shaped the regime in southwest Missouri to meet their expectations with relative ease. On private land, leaseholds offered benefits to all parties. For landowners, leasing was a means to profit from the growing mineral industry without disrupting their agricultural efforts or risking their own bodies and money. With overextended smelters desperate to buy mineral, meanwhile, skilled miners could earn handsome sums based on their productivity. While leasing required miners to risk investing their labor in ground that might not yield much, their geological knowledge and the apparent richness of the soft ground deposits tilted the odds of making money in their favor. At one Newton County mine, for example, three miners raised 70,000 pounds of mineral in eighteen months. After paying 8,750 pounds to the landowners as a royalty, the miners sold the remainder and shared the proceeds, which totaled more than $1,000 after deducting the cost of tools, fuel, and food. Not all made such high sums. Two miners working another claim shared fifty dollars in profits after mining 3,500 pounds of mineral in three months in 1854.23

Whether the newcomers experienced wild success or simply broke even, they had confidence that the prospects, based on the trend of profitable discoveries, would only yield more galena. “Mineral is found over this whole region,” Swallow concluded, where “scarcely a shaft has been sunk … without obtaining mineral sufficient to render the labor profitable.” “The day is not far distant,” he predicted, “when this will prove to be one of the richest mineral districts in the country.” In search of marketable metal, miners focused on extracting only galena despite its natural occurrence among large quan-
tities of sphalerite, the most common mineral form of zinc. Swallow noted that sphalerite, “called Black-Jack by the miners, is almost as abundant as the galena in many of the mines” but that “many thousand pounds have been thrown out with the rubbish.” Although techniques for smelting zinc had been developed in Europe and were in use in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, no one west of the Appalachians had mastered the process. While Swallow and others anticipated the future profitability of zinc, it was not yet so.

More and more miners arrived to seek their share of the wealth. By early 1855 prospectors swarmed the hillsides along Shoal, Turkey, and Center Creeks, some working on proper leasehold agreements with landowners, others digging where they liked on land that no one seemed to claim. Among the latter was Robert Brock, an experienced miner who had recently arrived from Wisconsin. Digging along a seasonal creek bed near William Foster’s discovery, Brock struck an uncommonly rich vein of galena on uninhabited, seemingly public land. When he inquired about the land, Brock learned that the tract had been included in the 1852 grant to the Southwest Branch Railroad. Since construction had not even commenced, and many doubted whether it ever would, Brock continued to mine, rent-free. But he could not keep his discovery a secret. Word of his find “was electric,” one commentator reported. The excitement, according to the Daily Missouri Republican, “caused the miners to come pouring in from the ‘diggings’ which had previously been discovered in this county and Jasper; and, as usual in such cases, began prospecting as near the famous discovery already made as possible.” By the end of the year, the stampede, as it became known, had brought several hundred miners onto the land surrounding Brock’s discovery. Merchants, saloonkeepers, lawyers, and other backcountry schemers on the make soon followed. Most of the miners joined Brock as squatting prospectors on the railroad’s section, none of them with any clear legal right to do so. They called their settlement Granby, perhaps after the town in Connecticut near where, in the 1730s, Samuel Higley had minted Granby coppers, the first American coins, from metal he mined himself.

White men, most of them native born, predominated at Granby. When the census enumerator surveyed Newton County in July 1860, the vast majority, over 80 percent, of the men who gave their occupation as “miner” had been born in the United States. The enumerator considered all but one to be white. Jacob Blackwell, a twenty-six-year-old Missourian, was the only person of color; he was free. Many miners, such as Brock and Foster, had come from the older lead-mining fields. The successes of the skilled, however, also attracted those with little or no experience. These men came from Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, and even as far afield as Alabama and North Carolina.
None owned much property, certainly not slaves. Most of the foreign-born miners came from the British Isles, particularly from Cornwall and Wales, where metal mining had a long history.26

In contrast to the early western precious metal camps, where transient single men predominated, most of the Granby miners, especially the more experienced ones, traveled with their families. These men and women organized households with traditional gender roles while pursuing entrepreneurial mining ventures. George and Sarah Benge, who were twenty-six and twenty-eight years old, respectively, came from Iowa, where their daughter had been born. The details of their lives plausibly suggest a pattern of movement through the lead fields of the Mississippi Valley. George was born in Ohio, but Sarah was born in Missouri; the two could have met in the mining camps of eastern Missouri or near Dubuque. Although over thirty years older than the Benges, William and Sarah Linton, who were both born in South Carolina, moved to southwest Missouri with their five children, who had all been born in Illinois. Their neighbors, A. B. and Catherine Fowler, who were from Ohio and Georgia, respectively, had two children under the age of five, who had been born in Illinois. Jonathan and Agnes Tisdall, meanwhile, came from England, but their five children, all under the age of ten, had been born in Wisconsin and Iowa. Although Granby soon featured several boardinghouses, family groups anchored the mining camp by providing homes for single miners. For example, David and Mary Holland, who had two children, boarded four single miners, two born in England and two born in Wisconsin. Other families did likewise. While all shared interests in lead mining, the centrality of family groups revealed longer-term commitments and provided much needed stability and cohesion in a new mining camp. These social groups also reflected the era’s ideal of respectable white manhood with experienced miners as paternal figures who were expected to be responsible, industrious, and independent.27

The first image we have of the Granby camp, sketched during Swallow’s second visit in the summer of 1857, shows two hillsides covered with dwellings and small-scale mines. Although the lithograph does not show us the men as they worked in the ground, it depicts surface methods sufficient for us to imagine what their work was like. In the foreground we see men gathered near what miners called an “armstrong” windlass, a large crank with handles on either end that wound a rope around a central axle. The windlass straddled the mouth of the mine. Everyone and everything entered and exited by means of the windlass and the strong arms that turned it. The shallow depth of the “soft ground” mineral here—from twenty to seventy feet deep—allowed for mining methods powered entirely by human labor. In
this pre-dynamite era, miners wielding picks and shovels dug out the galena from irregular deposits that pitched, narrowed, and finally pinched out. They hoisted the mineral to the surface in buckets. The work was difficult, hot, and often dangerous and required cooperation between miners, in small groups or even in pairs. This foregrounded scene is replicated in the image almost fifty times, with each shaft marked by a windlass, of which there are almost as many as there are residences. Whether they lived in log cabins or simple tents, the Granby miners worked their own holdings, close by one another. These crowded conditions encouraged an ethic of rough equality and fairness between mining groups so that they did not interfere with each other’s chances to make money. Everyone understood that those chances were good. According to Swallow, miners regularly located chunks of galena “so large that it is found somewhat difficult to raise them to the surface.”

Although trespassing on railroad land, they claimed mining rights by virtue of their discovery and labor. Once word of the Granby boom reached St. Louis, representatives of the railroad asserted control. According to one account, the miners, who by early 1857 numbered nearly 1,000, argued that their investment of “labor and industry” to locate and remove “the immense mineral wealth” gave them rights to continued access that preempted any claim the railroad made on the land or on them; in other words, they invoked
the older “finding’s keeping” principle. When railroad agents tried to collect rent, the miners refused to pay. With enough problems elsewhere, and a long, rough wagon ride between St. Louis and Granby, the railroad did not pursue the issue with much energy. And so, for a time, the miners enjoyed complete control over the mines. Market conditions also favored them. In 1856–57, lead sold for over six cents per pound in St. Louis, the highest price in living memory. An observer estimated in January 1857 that miners had sold 5 million pounds of galena from the Granby land in less than two years.29

The sudden productivity of the Granby camp, however, soon exposed the limits of its isolation. Several smelters had opened in the vicinity after Brock’s discovery, but they lacked the currency to buy all of the galena being produced. The Panic of 1857 compounded problems by further reducing the amount of money in circulation as well as demand. Soon most of the local smelting outfits were broke; Tingle and Harklerode were gone and the Moseleys “hopelessly insolvent.” “Capital is wanted to pay for mineral as it is brought to the furnace,” a local physician reported. Those able to overcome the financial obstacle of paying for mineral usually lacked the means to pay the expensive transportation costs required to reach distant markets. “The smelters are generally responsible men, but owing to the great difficulty of getting lead to the river, their means have become exhausted.” According to the Daily Missouri Republican, “the greatest obstacle to the progress of Granby has been a want of market for their mineral.” These structural and financial limitations created a bottleneck that placed sharp limits on profitability. The weakness of the smelters meant that “little money was thrown into circulation,” the paper reported in early 1858, and “general hard times with the miners was the natural result.”30

Southwest Missouri miners and St. Louis–based manufacturers needed one another. As the military and commercial entrepôt to the western frontier, St. Louis provided a growing, lucrative market for manufacturers of all kinds but especially for those of lead-based goods. At first, smelters in Carondelet and Herculaneum processed mineral from the eastern Missouri and Upper Mississippi fields into pig lead for sale to manufacturers in the East. With the growth of Jefferson Barracks in the 1830s and 1840s, then the nation’s largest military post, the U.S. Army created local demand for lead, primarily for ammunition to supply the soldiers securing the nation’s expansion. Soon the steamboats pushing off the riverfront wharves headed west instead of east. As merchants packed them with goods such as white lead paint, red lead cosmetic rouge, and lead type for printing presses, they widened the market for local manufacturing. The demand for lead goods made in St.
Louis also increased as the population of the city itself grew, from 16,000 in 1840 to 160,000 in 1860. As production from the Mississippi Valley mines collapsed in the 1850s, St. Louis–based manufacturers struggled to access an adequate supply of mineral to meet these demands. The completion in 1853 of the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad linking the mines of the Upper Mississippi field to an eastern shipping route only made matters worse. New, more intense competition over a diminishing resource forced St. Louis firms to seek alternative sources of mineral.31

Ferdinand Kennett had planned for this. In June 1857, he used his brother’s influence to lease the entire Granby section of land, 640 acres, from the Southwest Branch Railroad. He did so in partnership with brothers Peter E. Blow and Henry T. Blow, both prominent St. Louisans. Politically, the three made an odd combination. Elected to the state senate in 1854, Henry Blow opposed slavery, particularly in his own family. He supported the freedom suit of Dred Scott, whom his parents had owned and Blow himself manumitted in May 1857. His partners, by contrast, were slaveholders; in 1860, Kennett owned fifty slaves and Peter Blow owned six. The pursuit of profit, however, united them. The formation of their new company, Blow & Kennett, consolidated major interests in Missouri lead. Kennett owned the St. Louis Shot Tower Company as well as mineral lands in eastern Missouri and, since 1852, in Jasper County. Henry Blow had built the Collier White Lead and Oil Company into the city’s largest manufacturer of paint and pigment and thus its largest commercial buyer of lead. The company bought much of its lead from Peter Blow, Henry’s brother, who owned mining interests in Washington County, Missouri, not far from Kennett’s mines. The lease Blow & Kennett signed with the railroad gave the company the right to act as the owner for the purposes of mining on the entire tract for ten years. In exchange, Blow & Kennett agreed to pay the railroad a rent of either two dollars for every 1,000 pounds of mineral mined or 10 percent of its value, depending on prevailing prices.32

From the outset, Blow & Kennett aimed to buy and smelt lead, not mine it directly, and so needed the skilled miners already at Granby to remain. Soon after signing the lease in 1857, the company offered clear terms to the squatters: they “should continue upon their claims, and work them as heretofore,” on a sublease basis from the company. The terms required, however, that the miners sell their ore to Blow & Kennett at the company price, sixteen dollars per 1,000 pounds, and pay rent of two dollars for every 1,000 pounds they produced. The company stipulated that its future price would fluctuate on a sliding scale in proportion to market trends in St. Louis. In cash terms, Blow & Kennett’s offer paled in comparison to the price that miners had re-

*Finding’s Keeping / 37*
ceived in the area only two years earlier, when smelters paid twenty dollars per 1,000 pounds. On the other hand, the offer was now the best they could get after local smelters had collapsed. It also allowed squatters to continue working their claims, thus recognizing their investment of time and labor and creating preemptive rights that defended them against other miners who were continuing to arrive in the area. Furthermore, the deal made the labor of these miners less economically risky because it provided access to a reliable buyer. From the company’s perspective, these terms promised a supply of galena at below-market prices, which would compensate for the high transportation costs to St. Louis and rent payments to the railroad. Blow & Kennett sealed its investment in late 1857 by constructing what was then the largest lead-smelting furnace in the United States at Granby. With eight eyes, the steam-powered blast furnace boasted a recovery rate of 80 to 90 percent and cost $20,000.33

Despite a moribund market, many miners rejected the offer as a threat to their prerogatives as free men who had invested time and labor. Squatters feared that they could “be driven from their claims and lose the rights which they regarded as belonging to them, and deprived of all profits arising from the working of their lots or claims.” They cooperated in defense of their position, as white men were expected to do. “Factions of disaffected miners were consequently formed,” one observer noted, and began “calling meetings both private and public in reference to the rights of Blow & Kennett, the legality of which they questioned.” They made a skilled case that showed considerable knowledge. The 1852 state law that granted land for the construction of a southwestern railroad stipulated that the railroad company could not dispose of any parcel of land until the actual construction of the line had progressed to within twenty miles of that parcel. Miners argued that the lease agreement violated this condition, since the nearest construction was over 200 miles away. Until the line neared Granby, they insisted, miners had the right to work as if the land was still in the public domain. While apparently happy to lease from those they considered legitimate landowners, the miners echoed older customary claims of “finding’s keeping” when they refused to acknowledge the rights of the railroad and Blow & Kennett, even though the company was a buyer with money. The holdouts continued to mine illegally into 1858 while trying to sell their mineral to local smelters.34

A mutual desire for Granby’s mineral wealth soon brought the company and the miners together. In early 1858, Blow & Kennett sued two miners, John Plummer and Eli Powers, in Newton County Circuit Court for illegally mining 50,000 pounds of galena from the company’s leasehold. The company argued that the terms of the lease gave it sole legal control over

38 / Finding’s Keeping
the land and any mineral found there. The county court, however, sided with the miners, who had argued that the lease was illegitimate and that their labor gave them preemption rights. While miners continued to work their claims at Granby, Blow & Kennett appealed the ruling to the Missouri Supreme Court, which overturned the lower court’s ruling in March 1859. The high court declared that the company’s lease gave it the rights and privileges of full ownership of the land in question for as long as it lasted. “The miners raved,” one local recalled, “but were powerless to overthrow the monopoly.” Their resistance, however, did not go unrewarded. Keen to establish good working relations with the miners, Blow & Kennett reiterated its original offer while raising the price for galena to twenty dollars per 1,000 pounds. The deal was too lucrative to pass up. Former squatters who had rich claims but struggled to find buyers now seized the chance to sell galena for a good price. According to one source, the offer from Blow & Kennett “soon brought about a mutual good feeling between the proprietors and miners.” Even Plummer and Powers took advantage of the deal. In 1860, the federal census surveyor reported that both men enjoyed substantial wealth: Plummer owned property worth over $16,000, including one enslaved man, while Powers claimed over $7,000.35

The accord fueled Granby’s economic and social prosperity. When Albert Richardson, a New-York Daily Tribune reporter, visited in 1859, he found 2,000 people living and working in Granby, a “rude village . . . dotted with log buildings, and like a prairie-dog town, with mounds of red loam gravel and stone thrown up from hundreds of shafts.” Where two years before little social life existed beyond the mines and the smelter, a thriving community of families and single men now enjoyed the services of several grocers, merchants, physicians, attorneys, shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, blacksmiths, barkeepers, and hotelkeepers. The place had become respectable. Residents could send their children to one of at least five schools and could even attend a church. G. C. Swallow could hardly believe how much had changed when he returned to southwest Missouri in 1859. “In the fall of 1854,” he recalled, “there was not a cabin on the site where Granby now stands with several thousand inhabitants; and only one shaft had been sunk beneath the soil into the rich mineral veins, which are now penetrated by thousands.” In the eighteen months to November 1859, the miners working in these shafts, now numbering almost 1,000, produced over 7.5 million pounds of galena, more than five times as much as the entire region had yielded between 1850 and 1854. All “seemed to be agreed,” Swallow noted, “that the Granby Mines are the best they have ever seen.”36

Miners made money and maintained autonomy in the new relationship...
with Blow & Kennett. Although the smelting company legally held the land, the miners, working individually or in small companies, retained complete authority over the work on their leaseholds, from the windlass down. They financed their operations with backing from local merchants. Take, for example, the progress of Joseph Hopkins, a forty-two-year-old miner in 1860 with extensive experience in the lead fields of eastern Missouri. He first began work on his claim as a squatter. In 1858, however, he signed a sublease with Blow & Kennett. Hopkins then entered a partnership with B. K. Hersey, a local merchant, who provided what was known as a “grubstake,” a cash investment to buy supplies and equipment in exchange for a share of the mine’s profits, often 10 percent. Hopkins used the money to hire laborers to open new tunnels from the original shaft and to construct wooden rails to speed transportation between the different parts of the mine. Laborers, such as those Hopkins hired, earned $1.25 per day with hopes of soon investing in their own sublease. From April 1858 to November 1859, Hopkins, Hersey, and Company mined over 1.2 million pounds of mineral. Meanwhile, William Frazer took a succession of grubstake partners, including Hersey and Hopkins, as he developed his claim. He mined more than 1 million pounds of galena in 1859, which amounted to an average monthly profit of $1,400 after paying expenses and his partners.37

Miners performed hard, dangerous labor in pursuit of such achievements. After descending seventy feet down a shaft while standing in a bucket and clinging to the lone rope, Richardson toured a “labyrinth of passages, at times not more than two feet high,” where he saw miners “lying flat upon their backs, digging [galena] with picks” and “perched high in a gallery, breaking off the blocks and rolling them down.” “Sometimes there are huge masses nearly pure,” he explained, “again it is mingled with flint rock; and again the vein seems to run out, but re-appears in unexpected directions.” The miners he met embraced the risks involved, both physical and mental. They “sometimes obtained no reward for many days, and again cleared a hundred and fifty dollars a week.” One miner admitted that the pursuit of mineral wealth was “a slave’s life,” but he “was unable to content himself in any other pursuit.”38

Enslaved to what? These miners bound themselves not to Blow & Kennett but to the vicissitudes of the market price of lead, which determined the value of mineral. With prices rising to unprecedented levels in the 1850s, they invested hard, physical effort in their own ability, often honed by experience, to locate and exploit the area’s rich but often fragmented deposits of galena. Although Blow & Kennett diminished some of the freedom that miners had enjoyed in southwest Missouri, these white men could still pros-
per from their skill as workers—slavery’s opposite. A life committed to mining metal was indeed hard, but the potential rewards—independence, respect, and profit—equaled any that free men with little property could hope to attain in 1860 and were difficult to resist.

Enough miners experienced sufficient success after 1855 to sustain the field’s lucrative and democratic promise. Frazer “came to Granby poor,” an 1859 credit report noted, “but has made it is said some money.” He invested in a store while he continued “makg money mining.” George and Sarah Benge, meanwhile, claimed personal assets worth more than $4,600 in 1860. More common were mining families like A. B. and Catherine Fowler, who possessed property worth $150, or David and Mary Holland, who claimed assets worth $200, or Jacob Blackwell, who reported $125 in personal property. A census survey of ninety-nine Granby miners revealed forty-two with property worth an average of $279. Of those forty-two miners, six owned assets worth $1,000 or more, five owned $500 or more, eleven owned $100 or more, and twenty-two owned $25 or more. Most of these people were decidedly not rich, but their accumulations of wealth were not insignificant when in 1860 the average gross annual income was only $297. Fifty-seven miners in the sample, however, owned no property at all.39

The future looked bright. The success of Granby inspired more min-
ing in Jasper County. In 1859 Swallow revisited the cluster of mines along Center Creek. He found only thirty miners at the small camp, which they called Minersville, but their pace was accelerating. The three most profitable mines were all new since his previous visit. William Orchard’s success there demonstrated that good mineral land could be found outside Granby. By 1860 Orchard claimed over $2,000 in personal wealth. Meanwhile, at Leadville, miners continued to work the land leased from Cox and McKee. Swallow reported that even though their mines extended down only about fifteen feet, the deposits “have been worked with success and profit” and were “much esteemed by the miners.” Although no production figures survive, geologist Arthur Winslow estimated that the Jasper County mines produced around 100 tons of galena a year in the 1850s. Still, the surging productivity at Granby led the way. In 1860, according to one report, Blow & Kennett bought over 7 million pounds of mineral, 28 percent more than the year before, making the southwestern lead field the richest in the state of Missouri.40 Those riches would bring unforeseen dangers as the secession crisis gave way to national civil war.

The border conflict that bled Kansas and Missouri farming communities in the late 1850s had barely registered in Granby and Leadville. In the election of 1860, voters there chose sectional conciliation; Northern Democrat Stephen Douglas carried Newton County, while Constitutional Unionist John Bell won Jasper County. Southwest Missourians soon felt the effects of the Civil War, however, due to Governor Claiborne Jackson’s efforts to join the Confederacy in 1861. After failing to seize Federal installations in St. Louis, Jackson fled with his rebellious Missouri State Guard toward Arkansas, which had seceded in May. A U.S. force met Jackson’s army in July near Carthage, in Jasper County, in what many considered the first major land battle of the war. Jackson’s tactical victory led to further attempts by Federal forces to drive his army out of the state, most notably at the Battle of Wilson’s Creek in August 1861, where the Missouri State Guard and the Confederate Army of the West repulsed the U.S. effort. The Confederate victory bolstered popular support for Jackson among Missouri secessionists and gave him tenuous control over the southwestern counties. In October 1861, Jackson and secessionist legislators convened in Neosho, the seat of Newton County, to reestablish what they considered to be the legitimate government of the state. Soon after, this group passed a secession ordinance, which the Confederacy recognized in November, and declared Neosho the capital of Confederate Missouri. While the main Army of the West set up its winter camp forty-five miles to the south at Camp Jackson, Arkansas, the Missouri
State Guard remained in Newton County. The combined force of more than 16,000 soldiers gave the Confederacy control of the surrounding countryside, including Granby.41

Rebel leaders soon realized the strategic fortune of their makeshift Newton County headquarters. While Granby occupied “a range of bare, desolate, bleak-looking hills,” an amazed Louisiana soldier observed, “the mines are the richest in the known world.” The Confederacy needed lead for ammunition but lacked mines of any significance west of Virginia. An agent for the Missouri State Guard offered to buy lead from Blow & Kennett, but Peter Blow, who was in sole charge of the Granby operations following Ferdinand Kennett’s death earlier that year, refused “to sell a solitary pig of lead or anything else belonging to the firm to the so-called Southern Confederacy.” Undeterred, the Missouri State Guard took forcible control of the mines and the smelter. News of the seizure worried metal industry leaders. “We are very sorry to learn that the richest lead mine in Missouri, and, indeed, probably on the globe, is now in the hands of the insurgents,” a mining journal noted in late 1861. “With the mines and furnaces at Granby in their possession, the rebels can supply themselves with lead to any required extent.”42

For that to happen, however, the Confederates would have to master the same problems that had bedeviled southwest Missouri miners since the late 1840s. The first involved transportation. The Rebels captured 32,000 pounds of pig lead and well over 100,000 pounds of unsmelted mineral when they took Granby. They chose to ship it to Fort Smith on wagon supply trains through the Ozarks, a rugged journey of over 120 miles. Secretary of War Judah Benjamin believed that the quartermaster could haul 200,000 pounds of lead a month this way. The Confederates never reached Benjamin’s target.43

Although Jackson’s army had the mines, it did not have many miners. Thousands of people fled southwest Missouri during the violent events of 1861, including Peter Blow and most of the miners, who scattered, many to fight, some for the Confederacy, others for the United States. By the time Benjamin began planning to receive Missouri lead, few experienced miners or smelters remained to produce it. Aware of the problem, the Confederate government contracted a Memphis company in December 1861 to work the mines with enslaved labor, but the new labor force never arrived. In February 1862, the U.S. Army of the Southwest defeated the Army of the West at the Battle of Pea Ridge, Arkansas, which pushed regular Confederate forces out of the area.44

Despite the Federal victory, Blow & Kennett struggled to overcome war-related disruptions and restart operations at Granby. While Kennett’s death in May 1861 gave the Blows sole control of the company, President Abraham
Lincoln appointed Henry Blow ambassador to Venezuela that summer. To complicate matters, U.S. forces maintained a loose hold on the area that allowed guerillas sympathetic to the Confederacy to make periodic raids on Granby. What these raiders did not seize, Federal soldiers did. Between guerilla attacks in the summer of 1862, the Army of the Southwest requisitioned 1,182 pigs of lead, enough to fill forty-six wagons. Its officers promised to pay later. The threat of violence and the risk of working for little or no payment demoralized the remaining miners. "There are a few miners still holding on waiting in daily expectation of receiving some encouragement from you," a company agent reported to the Blows that July, "but nothing is being done in the mines." Henry Blow made direct requests to President Lincoln for a formal contract to supply lead for the military effort if only more soldiers could be deployed to protect the operations but to little effect. Rather, weak Federal authority in southwest Missouri encouraged a small Confederate force to attempt to retake control of Granby, which culminated in a major battle in September 1862 at Newtonia, seven miles east of the mines. The Confederates won that battle but could not hold the position.45

The muddled outcome of the Battle of Newtonia marked the beginning of a new period of intense guerilla raiding and casual violence that brought life and work to a standstill for the duration of the war. In the absence of any firm military control, secessionist guerillas established zones of control from which they frequently harassed Federal soldiers and area residents. The largest, most notorious guerilla band, led by Thomas Livingston, operated from a base near Minersville on Center Creek, where Livingston and his business partner William Parkinson had developed small, paying mines and built two blast furnaces just before the war. Able to provide their own ammunition, these guerillas controlled the western half of Jasper County until Federal soldiers killed Livingston in the summer of 1863. By then most of the prewar residents had fled. Mining stopped and did not begin again until 1865.46

When people returned in the final months of the war, they discovered towns and homesteads overgrown and in disrepair, if not completely destroyed. Granby was in ruins, the Blow & Kennett smelter a wreck. During four years of more or less constant violence, one correspondent reported, "the mines were unworked, the miners had sought other employment, and the fields were permitted to go to waste."47

The war exacerbated the problems of lead mining in southwest Missouri, but it accentuated the opportunities as well. After the Confederate surrender, Blow & Kennett not only rebuilt but expanded its operations at Granby,
incentivized by the price of lead soaring to ten cents per pound in 1865, almost double the value of the fat years of the 1850s. Before the guns had even gone silent in April 1865, the Blows reorganized Blow & Kennett as the Granby Mining and Smelting Company. Investors included some of the leading figures in the triumphant Republican Party, including warship builder James B. Eads; Barton Bates, who was Attorney General Edward Bates’s son; and St. Louis banker Thomas Dickson. Granby Mining used the fresh capital to begin repairing the smelter, despite legal uncertainty over the status of its lease with the Southwest Branch Railroad, which had gone bankrupt during the war and was in foreclosure with the state. To solve that problem, the firm used its pooled political clout to convince Governor Thomas Fletcher, a Republican who came from the lead-smelting town of Herculaneum and had worked as a land agent for the Southwest Branch in the 1850s, to extend its lease another ten years. When John C. Fremont, the Republican Party’s 1856 presidential candidate, bought the railroad in 1866, he named Eads an incorporator. Although still 140 miles short of Newton County, the reorganized and renamed Atlantic & Pacific Railroad promised the long-sought link not only to St. Louis but also to eastern cities via Eads’s proposed bridge across the Mississippi.48

With profitability nearly assured, Granby Mining now more than ever needed the kind of skilled, experienced miners who had transformed the district before the war. To attract them, the company offered the same liberal enticements of autonomy and profit-making potential. “This company expect,” the Daily Missouri Republican reported, “by large outlays, patience and enterprise, to make Granby the most attractive spot in the United States for industrious and skillful miners.” In October 1865, a correspondent who wrote under the name E. Pluribus Unum reported that the company was buying mineral for thirty dollars per 1,000 pounds, 50 percent more than it had paid five years earlier.49

The opportunity to make money reunited white miners. “You can now see number [sic] of windlasses at work all over Granby,” he said, with “‘Rebs’ and ‘Feds’ all mixed together … delving in the bowels of the earth in search of greenbacks instead of fighting for it as they have done for the past four years.” “Miners,” another observer urged, “this is the place for you.”50