

**8.0 Introduction**

The region of Storey County outside of the Comstock Historic District contains numerous active, inactive or abandoned mine sites and a significant number of archeological sites, both historic and prehistoric. Archeological sites and mines sites are found clustered in specific regions and in isolated locations. Many sites are in regions remote from public access. Archeological sites provide information allowing the study of cultural forms of the past. Mining activity as reflected in active, inactive and abandoned mine sites may have a significant positive impact on the present economy and environment of the region. Planning commissioners should recognize and evaluate the importance and merit of each site when formulating planning goals for land use decisions.

**8.1 The Comstock Historic District**

Because of the historical significance of the Comstock Lode, preservation efforts in the Virginia City area began in the 1940's. Attempts were made by local residents to establish preservation boards and to acquire bonds for restoration of the town proper.

In 1961, the Secretary of the Interior designated the Virginia City National Landmark under the Historic Sites Act of 1935. In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act passed and the Virginia City National Landmark was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The designation of the Virginia City National Landmark remains a federal designation with federal laws and regulations administered by the National Park Service.

The Virginia City Historic District Act was established in 1969 and amended in 1971 to the Comstock Historic District Act (N.R.S. 384) to include all of the Comstock, Dayton, and Sutro. In 1981, the Comstock Act was again amended regarding trailers, mobile homes and recreational vehicles. In 1990, the boundaries of the Comstock Historic District were refined and outlying properties with no significant historic integrity were eliminated.

The District presently contains 28,120+ acres.

The Comstock Historic District Commission (CHDC) was established 20 years ago to promote the knowledge and preservation of the cultural resources of the Comstock Historic District. The CHDC provides specific information for property owners regarding the maintenance, rehabilitation, stabilization and restoration of historic structures within the District and encourages property owners of commercial buildings to utilize federal tax-credit programs.

The CHDC is charged with reviewing all permits for structures to be erected, reconstructed, altered, restored, moved or demolished within the District boundaries. Persons who wish to do such work must obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the CHDC prior to commencing work. Nevada Revised Statute 384 established the definition, board make-up, functions and powers under which the CHDC operates.

In its review process, the CHDC determines whether the proposed action is appropriate to "the interests of the historic district and congruous with the aspects of the surrounding historic environment of the district" (N.R.S. 384.10) The criteria the CHDC considers in evaluating applications for Certificates of Appropriateness include the following:

- Historic and architectural value and significance;
- architectural style;
- location of the lot;
- position of the structure in relation to a public way and visibility from a public place;
- general design, arrangement, texture, material, color and size of the exterior architectural features and the relation ship of building to others in the neighborhood;
- relation of a structure's exterior architectural features to the recognized styles of early western architecture of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The CHDC provides free brochures on construction standards and design guidelines for the district.

All major applications are reviewed in an open public meeting, allowing for public input. Only through public meetings can residents or other members of the public express their feelings about the actions of the CHDC. The members of the board also need to have public opinion to provide them with direction regarding the attitudes of the people who are interested in the management of the resource.

The CHDC has an inspector/clerk that is responsible for:

- Reviewing certain exterior changes to buildings/structures which do not necessarily require CHDC review. The inspector/clerk reserves the right to refer any project to the CHDC for review.
- Makes recommendations to the CHDC on agenda items.
- Establishes the agenda for the monthly meetings.
- Maintains the official records of the CHDC.
- Develops education programs for the area.
- Assists other agencies with preservation projects.

Other functions provided for in N.R.S. 384 are establishing and maintaining an office which houses the library and the official records of the CHDC. The office provides a location where people can review proposed projects with the staff. The CHDC is also charged with policing the district for violations of any of the provisions of N.R.S. 384.

The CHDC and the Storey County Board of Commissioners have developed permit review guidelines which minimize conflicts. Most pertinently, a building project must have prior approval by the CHDC before the County Building Department will issue a building permit.

### **Resource Inventory History**

Various inventories of buildings, historic and prehistoric sites, and other resources within the District have been undertaken since the 1939 Historic American Building Survey. Most of these efforts have been focused on architectural resources in and around Virginia City since they are perceived to be the most prominent cultural elements on the Comstock. A 1979 partial inventory of buildings by Heather Hallenberg led to the establishment of new construction and rehabilitation project design guidelines for Comstock Historic District buildings.

The first comprehensive inventory of historic buildings and structures known as the HAER Inventory was undertaken in 1980 by the Department of the Interior's Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service. The resulting work constitutes an important resource for the Comstock Historic District Commission in making decisions concerning the conservation of historic buildings. The project also provided initial archaeological and economic planning studies, walking and driving tour guides and further developed design guidelines for buildings and their environment in the District.

T. Allan Comp and his associates conducted a survey and inventory of buildings and structures. This survey known as "Project 85" focused on Virginia City and constitutes a total survey of all buildings within the town as of September 1985. Gold Hill, and the "Divide" area between Virginia City and Gold Hill, Silver City, and Dayton were surveyed in 1987. This project also proposed a cultural resources management plan and pointed toward the development of the Virginia City Tourism Authority to encourage cultural tourism. The 1987 survey information led to an amendment of the Virginia City Historic District nomination on file at the National Register of Historic Places in Washington D.C. Due to the survey, the period of significance has been extended to 1942 for this historic district.

In response to a request by the Storey County Board of Commissioners, Archaeological Research Services, Inc. (ARS) contracted to do archival and field studies. Prepared by archaeologist Ronald L Reno, these findings were reported in the Sensitivity Study of the Storey County Portion of the Comstock Historic District. This report also contained a summary of previous planning recommendations, an outline of an archaeological mitigation plan, and an archaeological inventory of Cottonwood Spring and vicinity. The product of this work is a set of five sensitivity maps designed to summarize location and potential significance of landscape, historic archaeological, prehistoric archaeological, architectural and mineral resources.

Both the Comstock Historic District Commission and the Storey County Planning Commission utilize these sensitivity maps in evaluating architectural changes and construction within the district.

## **Areas of Concern:**

Considerable concern has been expressed regarding the impact of surface mining on existing cultural resources. The CHDC's area of responsibility is presently limited to review of exterior architectural features and does not include review of land altering activities. The CHDC will review such projects if formally requested by the local government, state or federal agencies. Recent mine development plans have included cultural resource surveys, protection and preservation of buildings and sites and mitigation of negative impacts where disturbance is unavoidable. For further information and recommendations see the "Sensitivity Study of the Storey County Portion of the Historic District" as prepared by Ronald L. Reno, July 16, 1990 (see appendix).

Because of the historical significance of many areas of Virginia City, the CHDC is responsible for maintaining their historical integrity. This creates a necessity for the District Commission to have some involvement in land use planning.

Because tourism is essential to Virginia City's economy, preservation of the Historic District is appropriate and should attempt to present an accurate portrayal of the Comstock Lode's past.

## **8.2: Outside the Comstock Historic District**

### **8.2.1 Introduction**

This section, produced by Lawrence E. Meeker of the Department of Geological Sciences, Geological Engineering Division, Mackay School of Mines, University of Nevada, Reno, discusses mine sites (both active and inactive) and archaeological sites in the county. This information is given to assist in decisions regarding land use planning, as well as decisions regarding resources lying outside the Comstock Historic District boundaries.

### **8.2.2 Data Presentation**

Data on mine sites has been obtained from current sources available from the Mackay School of Mines Library at the University of Nevada, Reno and United States Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangle maps. When dealing with specific land use proposals planning officials should consult the Storey County possessory and patented claim maps available in the Storey County Assessor's Office.

Data on archaeological sites have been obtained from the Nevada State Museum and U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Most sites have been field checked for accuracy, however, locations of specific development proposals may warrant additional field or archival research to evaluate the cultural resources affected.

## Mine Sites

Active mines are those that indicated activity in 1988. A total of nine different active mines are indicated by this measurement. Inactive (abandoned) or status-not-indicated mines may be reopened and worked depending upon factors which affect the ability of the mine owner to bring the mine into production. A total of 47 different 'inactive' or 'status-not-indicated' mines are in this category.

If abandoned, state law requires owners of these mines to erect fences or other safeguards around mine workings. It is the responsibility of the Board of County Commissioners to oversee public protection of abandoned mines. Owners of record are notified of existing unsafe conditions and required to mitigate the hazard. If the owner cannot be found or refuses to comply, the county has the responsibility to fence or otherwise mitigate the situation and assess the owner accordingly.

## Archeological Sites: Historic and Prehistoric

A total of 63 archeological sites have been determined. Historic sites relate to the intrusion of the culture of United States citizens and include such features and artifacts as town sites, buildings and building sites, railroad structures and abandoned mine sites in addition to those sites depicted as inactive or abandoned mine sites.

Prehistoric sites are generally aboriginal in origin and include such features as rock art, nomad camp sites, trash locations and sites containing primitive tool, bone or other indications of land uses prior to the contact of european and indigenous American cultures. These sites are protected by U.S. federal law which prohibits the release of specific locational site information in a public document. Presently Storey County owns 80 acres of an archeological site and should consider making this a State Park. When and if the occasion arose, the county would work with adjacent property owners to further protect this and other historical sites. County officials should be aware of the conflict which this policy represents and be prepared to deal with it accordingly. Projects presented to planning officials could have a significant impact upon existing cultural resources. When land use development proposals are presented which are located on culturally sensitive lands, planning commissioners should request advice from the State Historic Preservation Officer, Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, Carson City. A review procedure will be initiated to identify impacts upon the significant, identifiable cultural resources existing in the county outside the boundaries of the Comstock Historic District.

### **8.3 The Arts**

The Arts have always been an important part of the history of Storey County and continue to play an integral part in its development. Some of the most recognized programs and institutions include:

**Artists' in Residence Program** sponsored by the Nevada State Council of the Arts. This program brings professional artists to visit the schools.

**Pipers Opera House** in Virginia City. This building needs to be restored so it can be enjoyed again by the community.

**The Virginia City Theater Muckers** which combines both amateur and professional talent.

**Saint Mary's Art Center**, one of the oldest active arts centers on the West Coast.

For more information about the Arts in Storey County, contact the Comstock Arts Council.