



STAFF REPORT

Report To: Board of Supervisors **Meeting Date:** May 7, 2020

Staff Contact: Darren Schulz, Public Works Director

Agenda Title: For Possible Action: Discussion and possible action regarding a proposed donation from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the installation of an informational kiosk about the American Flat Mill at the Virginia and Truckee (V&T) East Gate Depot in Carson City. (Darren Schulz, DSchulz@carson.org; Dan Stucky, Dstucky@carson.org)

Staff Summary: The BLM has offered to install an informational kiosk about the United Comstock Merger Mill (American Flat Mill) on Carson City-owned property at the V&T East Gate Depot. The American Flat Mill was related to two spurs of the V&T Railroad and was associated with a 10,000 foot electrified tunnel. The kiosk would cover the history of the mill, including its association with the V&T Railroad and the haulage tunnel.

Agenda Action: Formal Action / Motion **Time Requested:** Consent

Proposed Motion

I move to accept the donation from the BLM and authorize the installation of the informational kiosk.

Board's Strategic Goal

Quality of Life

Previous Action

N/A

Background/Issues & Analysis

As part of an interpretation project for the mitigation of the American Flat Mill, the BLM is proposing to install an informational kiosk to cover the history of the mill, including its association with the V&T Railroad and the haulage tunnel. The mill is spread out over 29 acres located approximately 1.5 miles south of Gold Hill, Nevada (part of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark). It boasted eight buildings, a 10,000-foot-long tunnel for electric trains transporting ore and water to the mill, and connections to two spurs of the V & T. Two trains with as many as twelve cars ran at any time through the haulage tunnel, delivering up to 6,500 tons of ore per train per day. The V & T transported houses for workers, building materials, mining equipment, and other supplies to the mill. The BLM has developed a website (<https://allaroundnevada.com/americanflat/>) on the American Flat Mill as a part of the mitigation for the site, as well as a documentary (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xotaj-ywdekE>).

A kiosk was installed in December 2019 near Gold Hill, NV. The BLM is proposing to install a similar kiosk at the V&T East Gate Depot site on Carson City owned land. The BLM would cover the installation costs and provide the brochures for the kiosk; however, the City would be responsible for the long-term maintenance of the kiosk. If the project is approved, BLM would tentatively plan to install the kiosk this summer or in the fall (October/November of 2020). The V&T is supportive of this project moving forward.

Applicable Statute, Code, Policy, Rule or Regulation

N/A

Financial Information

Is there a fiscal impact? Yes

If yes, account name/number: General Fund / Park Maintenance 1015012

Is it currently budgeted? Yes

Explanation of Fiscal Impact: Although BLM would pay for the installation costs and provide brochures for the kiosk, the City assumes ownership after installation and would be responsible for future maintenance. However, the kiosk will be constructed of high quality materials, and therefore future maintenance is expected to be minimal and could be absorbed within the current Park Maintenance budget. If there is significant damage to the kiosk, BLM would not require the City to replace or repair. It would be at the discretion of the City.

Alternatives

Do not accept the donation.

Attachments:

[1_NV-American-Flat-Brochure-2018.pdf](#)

[2_American Flat Mill Kiosk- Gold Hill, NV.pdf](#)

Board Action Taken:

Motion: _____	1) _____	Aye/Nay
	2) _____	_____

(Vote Recorded By)

To learn more, visit:
<https://allaroundnevada.com/americanflat/>

Bureau of Land Management
Carson City District Office
5665 Morgan Mill Road
Carson City, NV 89701
(775) 885-6000



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

The Historic Mill Site at American Flat

Former Home of the United
Comstock Merger Mill



Historical photos courtesy of the Joe Curtis Collection, the Nevada Historical Society,
and the Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno, Libraries.



1922 Opening Day Celebration for the American Flat Mill. Nevada Historical Society.

Nevada's Rich Mining History

In 1859 miners discovered the Comstock Lode—a massive silver ore body beneath Virginia City, Nevada. Word spread, and people traveled here from California and the eastern United States in search of riches. Virginia City prospered, and the Comstock Lode rose to national significance. The largest boom, the Big Bonanza, occurred in 1873–1880. Soon after, mining operations exhausted the highest-grade ores and the region's economy declined.

In the 1910s and 1920s mining engineers Roy Hardy and Alex Wise sought to take advantage of a new technology that used cyanide to extract gold and silver from ore. They believed that this Merrill-Crowe process would allow them to mine and mill low-grade ores and tailings at a profit. With the financial backing of local



The mill office on opening day, September 23, 1922. Nevada Historical Society.



Workers installing equipment at the fine-grinding building, 1922. Nevada Historical Society.

rancher Herbert Humphrey and wealthy investors in the Northeast, the United Comstock Merger Mill was constructed in 1922.

The mill, now commonly known as the American Flat Mill, spread out over 29 acres. It boasted eight buildings, a 10,000-foot-long tunnel for electric trains transporting ore and water to the mill, and connections to two spurs of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad (V & T). Two trains with as many as twelve cars ran at any time through the haulage tunnel, delivering up to 6,500 tons of ore per train per day. The V & T transported houses for workers, building materials, mining equipment, and other supplies to the mill.

Locals celebrated the completion of the mill, believing it would usher in a new era of prosperity. At the time, the mill was the largest of its kind in the world. The buildings and infrastructure, along with a town of prefabricated houses for the workers, cost \$5 million. Historians would later describe the American Flat Mill as the “last gasp of the Comstock.”



An ore train, with its electric battery locomotive, brought ore from the workings in Gold Hill and Virginia City to Building 1, the Ore Bin. Joe Curtis Collection.



V & T locomotive #25 delivering building materials to the mill during construction. Joe Curtis Collection.

Fall of a Giant

The American Flat Mill was short-lived, closing in 1926. The costs of mining and milling had been underestimated, partly because the ore proved sticky and difficult to process. To make matters worse, the ore's value had been overestimated, and silver continued to fall in value from a dollar an ounce in 1920, to about 67 cents an ounce in 1924. Ultimately, the Morse Brothers of Denver, Colorado, stripped and sold all of the machinery and items of value from the site, leaving only concrete ruins behind. Even workers' houses were moved to other locations, such as Virginia City.

By the 1960s the immense ruins, with their elaborate architecture, became a major attraction for locals and youthful partiers. The intriguing backdrop drew artists, filmmakers, and photographers as well. Graffiti, ranging from crude to intricate, would cover almost every inch of the ruins. For safety reasons, the mill was demolished in 2014.

Today, nothing remains of the American Flat Mill, but visitors can visit the historic site. It is located 1.5 miles south of Gold Hill, Nevada (part of the Virginia City National Historic Landmark). See inside of the brochure for an aerial photo and a description of building uses. Additional information and a virtual tour of the American Flat Mill before its demolition may be available from other sources on the Internet.



Hazards to the Public

Abandoned mining and milling sites are dangerous and can be deadly. The American Flat Mill was no different. The ruins became a serious public safety hazard. Unfortunately, fencing and warning signs posted by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) did not deter visitors. Serious injuries occurred every year, and one fatality was reported. A 2008 audit by the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of the Interior directed the BLM to mitigate the hazards. Six years later, all the buildings were demolished.



Good advice if you encounter an abandoned mine:
STAY OUT & STAY ALIVE

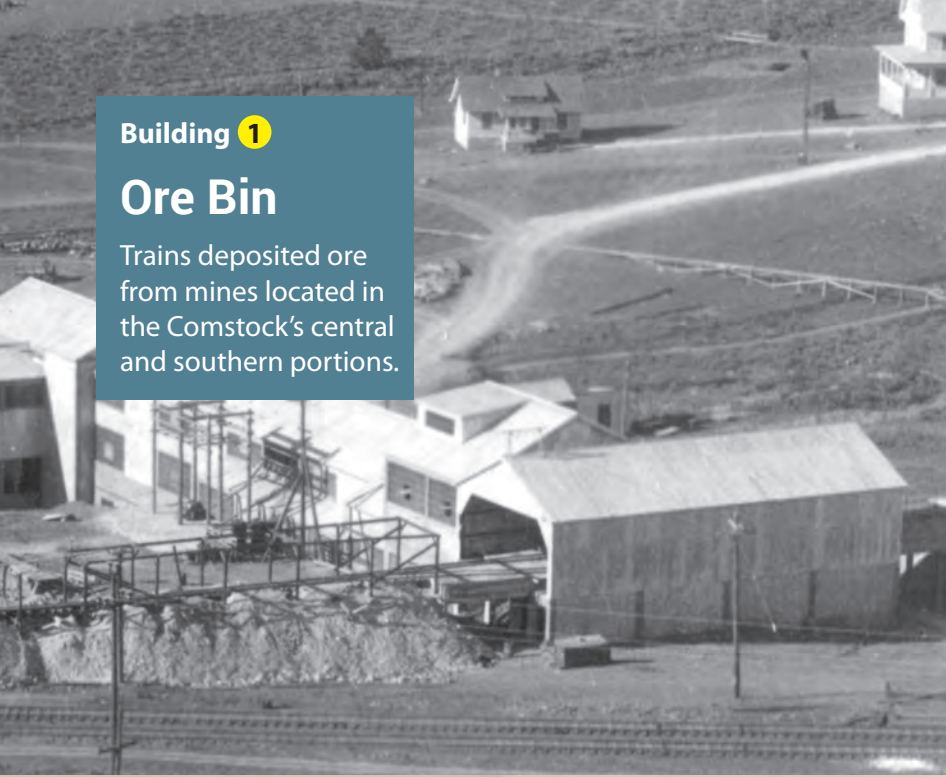
To be good stewards of our public lands, enjoy but do not deface or otherwise harm American heritage sites.

Graffiti photos courtesy of Howard Goldbaum.

Building 1

Ore Bin

Trains deposited ore from mines located in the Comstock's central and southern portions.



Building 8

Substation

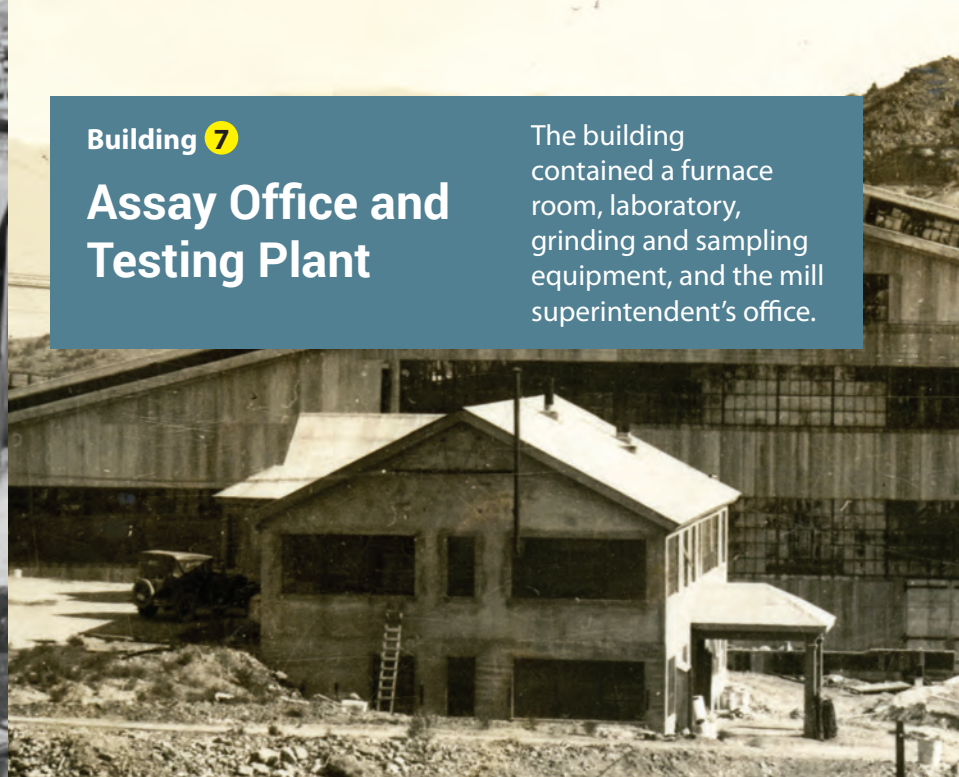
Three oil-cooled transformers located in the substation transferred power for use at the mill.



Building 7

Assay Office and Testing Plant

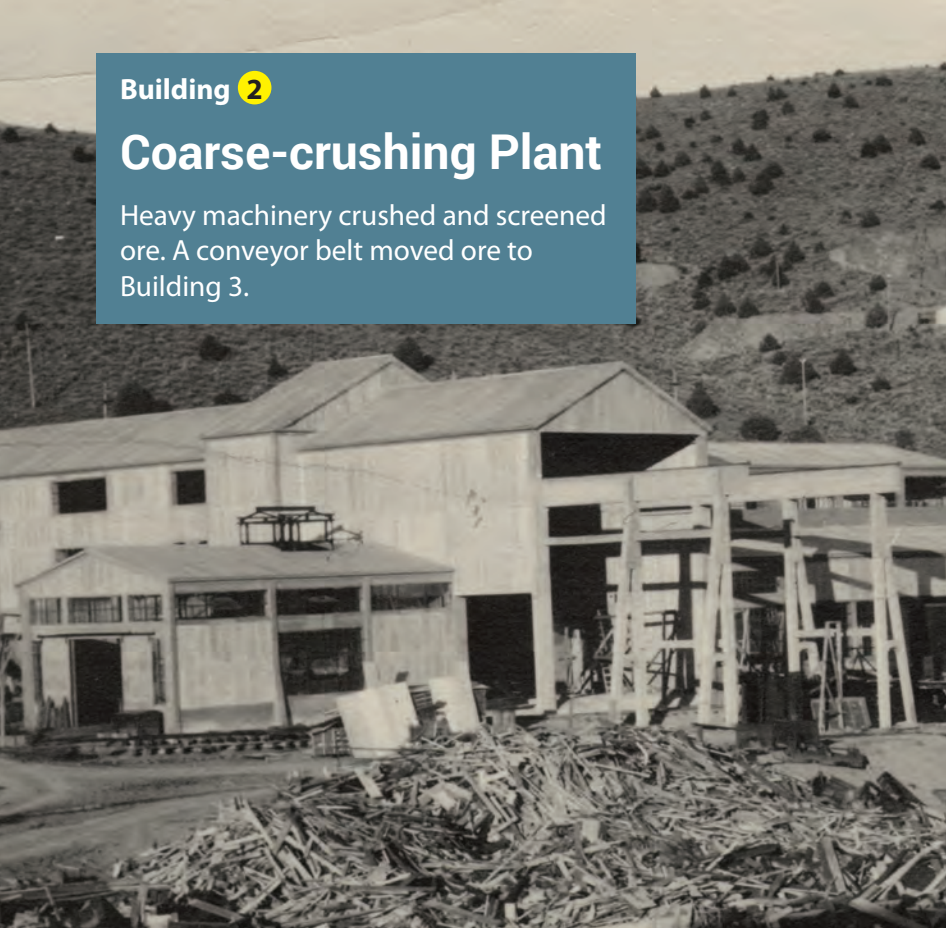
The building contained a furnace room, laboratory, grinding and sampling equipment, and the mill superintendent's office.



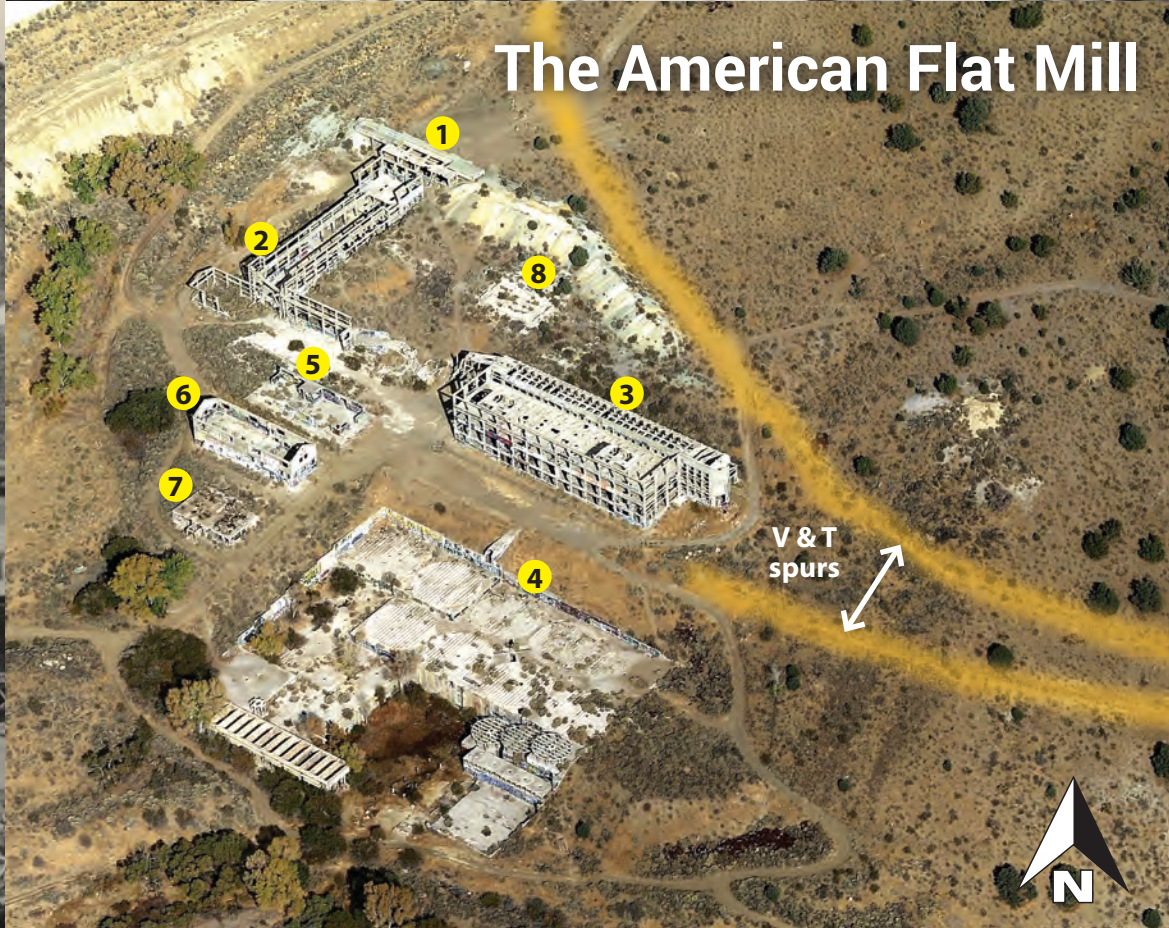
Building 2

Coarse-crushing Plant

Heavy machinery crushed and screened ore. A conveyor belt moved ore to Building 3.



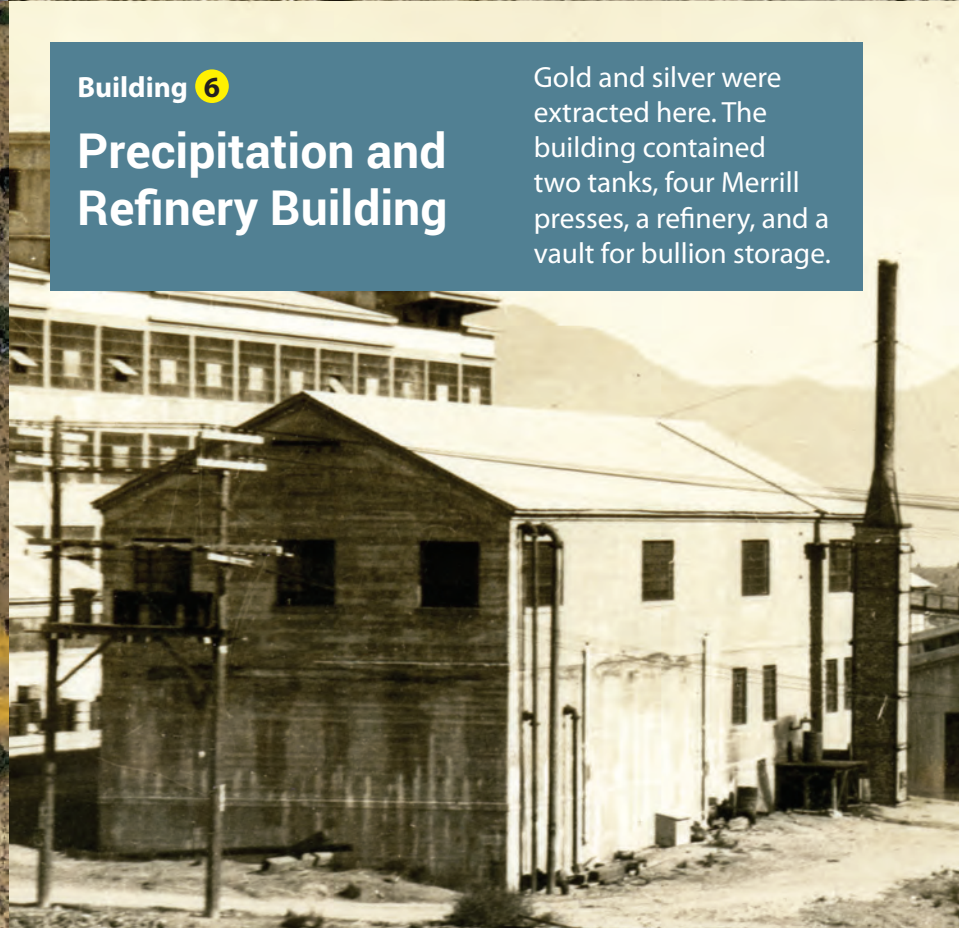
The American Flat Mill



Building 6

Precipitation and Refinery Building

Gold and silver were extracted here. The building contained two tanks, four Merrill presses, a refinery, and a vault for bullion storage.



Building 3

Fine-grinding and Concentration Plant

Ore was finely crushed by five ball mills and washed by 10 classifiers.



Building 4

Cyanide Plant

Ore was moved and processed into thickening, leaching, agitating, and storage tanks.



Building 5

Warehouse

The building housed a storekeeper's office, 3,000 bins for small items, and 1,000 square feet of storage for large items.



Historical photos courtesy of the Joe Curtis Collection, the Nevada Historical Society, and the Special Collections Department, University of Nevada, Reno, Libraries.



The American Flat Mill site today. Bureau of Land Management, Carson City District.



American Flat Mill informational kiosk installed in Gold Hill, NV



American Flat Mill informational kiosk installed in Gold Hill, NV