



California State Parks Video Transcript



Bodie: Ghost Town Frozen in Time

ECHOING VOICE: “Had an angel come to Earth and said, “There are many millions of dollars to be had for the digging, but there are penalties attached,” would men have accepted the gift?

“Go, take the treasure,’ he would have said. ‘But listen to the terms. You will go where desolation has from time immemorial held its seat. Your eyes will look out in the morning upon the desert, and only the desert. Your children will grow up where they will never hear a bird sing, never see a green field, nor know the blessing which comes at noon with the shade of a great tree. Once a week you will bring from the depths the broken body of what an hour before was a strong man. Your natures will grow metallic in thought; your dreams will be money only. You will see so few blessed, and so many suffer, that your heart will grow callused. And thousands of you will doubt all good in man, all mercy in God.’ *Bodie Standard News*, May 1878.”

NARRATOR: Bodie—8,400 feet above sea level; in summer seventy degrees; in winter twenty below zero. It wasn’t scenery that brought men to this place, a place to become known more for violence than treasure. Little remains as witness to that age.

Once called “City of the Sky” it was, during its heyday, the greatest mining excitement in the West; a microcosm of the hopes and fears of America itself—the last of the old-time mining camps.

To white men in 1849, the 12,000-foot peaks of the Eastern Sierra Nevada constituted mere obstacles on his trail to the gold fields of Northern California. But in 1859 California 49ers began hearing reports of gold placer diggings along the Eastern slopes. Nothing less than gold fever could make a man leave his family in New York and travel halfway around the world, all to end up in a place like this. But that’s what 49er William Bodey did.

In 1859 after eleven years of rainbow-chasing, otherwise known as prospecting, Bodey and four other men halted their burros in a shallow valley to dig yet another prospect hole. Bodey couldn’t believe his eyes; he was heard to remark that if this was finally pay dirt they had come a hell of a ways to find it. William Bodey would never get rich; less than three months later he lay dead, the victim of a treacherous Sierra Nevada blizzard.

Bill Bodey’s discovery just couldn’t be kept a secret. Word spread and soon a Bodie Mining District was formed, along with twenty claims. The claims were slowly worked in the 1860s because there just wasn’t enough gold to compare with richer strikes at places like Virginia City and Aurora. Mining men considered Bodie a dud. In 1874 just as miners were about to

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abandon the Bunker Hill Mine, there was an accidental cave-in; it revealed a fabulously rich vein of gold ore.

The first load of rock pulled onto the scales June the 10th, 1878, with over 10,000 pounds of rock that showed gold in every piece. So much, in fact, that the syndicate mill had to be shut down periodically to clean its stamps, which had become fouled by too much pure gold. A millrun of 1,000 tons of ore averaged 600 dollars a ton, and shocked the mining world.

Bodie was on the map now, and San Franciscans couldn't wait to sink cash into Bodie's mine shafts.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "I made the grand rounds of Bodie Bluff and saw enough to satisfy me that William Lent and other stockholders will be our next bonanza kings. The Standard is extracting ore above the 450-foot level and has a shaft down 800 feet in good ore. There is millions in her. The ledge holds out all the way down and is growing wider. The mill is now working what they call over here 'poor-ore,' that is forty-dollar rock. It would make a Grass Valley man's eyes pop out of his head to hear forty-dollar rock referred to as 'poor ore.' They are now cross-cutting to find the continuation of the Standard ledge; it is the big gamble of the camp. *Standard News*, November 1877."

NARRATOR: Bodie Bluff began to take on a pockmarked complexion as new mines sprang up along the ridge. From Bodie Bluff through Silver Hill to Queen Bee, they tunnel out the mountains and call the holes they made Champion, Red Cloud, Noonday, and Jupiter.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The splendid new thirty-stamp mill of the Noonday Company was started up for the first time Christmas afternoon in the presence of a large number of people and amid the snapping of champagne corks. A lady visitor sounded the whistle for the start, and the ponderous machinery moved off like the works of the most delicate watch."

NARRATOR: The mines needed miners, so companies were willing to pay high wages—four dollars a day for twelve hours of work, six days a week. Wages were high, but hopes were even higher.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The Standard is leaving many of its richest ore breasts and stokes untouched. Captain Thompson described one immense vein in which from wall to wall the gold glittered everywhere as though it has been fired into the mass from a blunderbuss. He visited the Noonday's today and will leave this afternoon for San Francisco, fully convinced that Bodie is the biggest mining district ever discovered."

NARRATOR: By 1878 people were pouring in. From other mining camps they came: Virginia City, Gold Hill, Aurora, and from cities like Sacramento and San Francisco. Many were the product of a rough and tumble west, ex-ranchers, Indian fighters, and assorted border ruffians. Many had labored on the transcontinental railroad or had fought as soldiers of the Blue and Gray. There were veteran 49ers. Some came to stake their own claims, others to work for wages, and some to work as little as possible. And there were immigrants: Irishmen, Swedes, Italians, Frenchmen, Chinese, and Mexicans. All to whom this journey to a new land of

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freedom of and hope was like a golden promise of a better life. Here was their chance to be in on the opening of another treasure house of the West.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “Main Street presented an appearance last night that could scarcely be equaled in any city of Bodie’s size. It was quite a matter of difficulty to make your way through the thrall. The saloons, eating houses, general stores, and various places of amusement were fairly packed with people, and considering the number of men working underground it is hard to understand what such a vast concourse of people do. Of course we ignore altogether the usual number of bums and vampires that follow in the wake of the energetic laboring masses.

“A man walked into a saloon and nodded his head at the crowd, twenty men stepped forward to answer the call. When he asked, “Boys, how many of you want to work?”, seventeen of them walked off, saying, “I thought he wanted us to drink,” The other three wanted to know what kind of work it was.

“Each day our streets are absolutely blocked up with teams, which come from all directions, loaded with every variety of freight. The scene on Main Street is exceedingly lively, and makes all feel more and more confident of the future of Bodie. *Bodie Standard News*, October 1878.”

NARRATOR: Despite nonstop construction, by the time winter snows began to fall in 1878, there were more people in Bodie than there was adequate shelter. Nightly temperatures, plummeting to minus-twenty degrees, sent the poorly housed and underfed indoors, wherever they could find it. Men slept under billiard tables, in saloon chairs, or walked the streets trying to stay warm until morning. Pneumonia claimed scores of lives.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “It is storming fearfully and people are flocking here that have neither friends or money. No room for anything or anybody. I cannot for the life of me see what is bringing people here. There are ten for every job. This is a hard place. The thermometer is sitting on a table four feet from a red-hot stove and registers sixty-two degrees. The wind is howling, the snow falling and drifting, making altogether a very dismal picture. Signed, E.S. Williams, 1878.”

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “December 1878—Bodie has a population of 5,000, including the suburb around the Bodie and Standard mines. The main street is nearly a mile long, and lots are staked off in all directions along the hillsides. The growth of the town has no parallel in the history of mining. Society has not assimilated, but the elements exist in a state of chaos. There are forty-seven saloons and ten faro tables.”

NARRATOR: The spring of 1879 saw renewed vigor, it was said the hammer and buzzsaw could be heard every day from sunrise to sunset.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “Main Street in our prosperous city is a boulevard of the skies. No city in the world has a street so high and so wide, 250 feet by 8,300 feet high is some avenue.”

NARRATOR: Wagon after wagon groaned with heavy loads of machinery, lumber, food, and dry goods freighted up Bodie Canyon.

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ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The stages come in loaded with passengers, and go out loaded with bullion."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "I went there as a boy of fourteen in June of 1879 when the camp was in its glory. Men came to Bodie from all over Nevada, from California, and from other places in the West; all of the adventurous type. The majority were of the best mining camp type, but there was also a gathering of the wildest, most desperate characters that ever infested a mining camp. The streets were alive with men at all times of the day and night. Signed, Grant Smith."

NARRATOR: Free enterprise was alive and kicking, many an entrepreneur was only too happy to provide a miner the necessities of life.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "We take pleasure in informing the people of Bodie and vicinity that we have spared no expense in fitting up a first class saloon where we shall be happy to dispense the very best of wines, liquors, and cigars. The bank exchange next door, by the Wells Fargo and the post office. McDermitt and Cullen, Proprietors."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Boone and Wright—Dealers in general merchandise. At the corner of Main and Green Streets. Groceries, provisions, crockery, glassware and pure whiskies."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Silas B. Smith's new dry good store will open Tuesday, November 25th, 1879, and will be run strictly on the cash system. The largest and most complete stock ever offered in Bodie. Dress goods, ladies underwear. Give us a call and satisfy yourselves."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The Bodie Bank—We transact general banking business. We sell exchange on San Francisco, New York and draw direct from all the principal cities of Europe. We buy and sell mining stocks strictly on commission. William Irwin, President"

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The Occidental Hotel, we claim for this house that it is the best furnished and most completely arranged of any in the state of California. It is our intention to supply a want long felt in Bodie and provide our patrons with the very neatest and most comfortable sleeping apartments possible to be fitted up. The rooms are large, airy, and provided with stoves and every convenience known to a comfortable home. Charges in accordance with the times. Kemp and Coleman, Proprietors."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "D. Tubino, formerly of San Francisco, respectfully informs his friends and the public that he is prepared to furnish to order all the delicacies the market affords. The best French cooks are employed and anything wanted is prepared to suit the taste. Give me a call and try the Oyster Bay Chop Stand. D Tubino, Proprietor, July 1879."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Virginia Assay Office and Chemical Laboratory, Main Street Bodie. Bullion and ores carefully assayed and guaranteed to coincide with the U.S. Mint. A. Sutterling, Proprietor."

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ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Having leased a large stable, we are now prepared to furnish the public with the best turnouts in Bodie—from a fine buggy team to a magnificent four-in-hand. Board for horses, and a sufficiency of good feed guaranteed. Old Tuolumne Stables, North Main Street, Bodie. Nick Ball, Proprietor."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Probably no district in the history of mining possesses such a singularly interesting and perfect formation. One which is certain to induce capital, industry, and intelligence, to go to extreme lengths in the cause of development. Signed, Professor Ben Sillman."

NARRATOR: The Bodie formation extended some 10,400 feet along the top of the ridge and was nearly three-quarters of a mile wide. To get to it would require hard work. Bodie deposits were left to men with a liking for brutal work and a harsh existence.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "We are continually annoyed by young men writing from the Atlantic states, requesting we use our influence in securing them a clerkship—something nice, clean, and easy. Let this answer suffice for all; if you can whack a sixteen-bull team, hit a drill, engineer a wheelbarrow, or deal faro, and shoot with some degree of accuracy, then we advise you to come right along. Otherwise, stay where you are as an ornament in a New York dry goods store. *Bodie Standard News*, September 1879."

NARRATOR: One theory, called the Vetta Madre, held that all the gold veins would descend into one deep gigantic central mother vein of incalculable worth. Plainly on the mind of every miner as he started his twelve-hour shift was that tantalizing prospect, and so the mines went deeper.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "This thing of being dropped down into the bowels of the earth in wooden buckets may be very amusing to read about, but I've enjoyed pleasanter modes of locomotion. There was one shaft which left an indelible impression on my mind. It was about four feet square, rough, black, and dismal, with a small flickering light, apparently 1,000 feet below, making the darkness visible. Down I crept, rung after rung, ladder after ladder, in the black darkness, with the solid walls of rock pressing the air close around me. With a desperate effort I proceeded, clinging to the frail woodwork as a drowning man clings to a straw, gasping for breath. It was an impressive sensation being so completely isolated, barred out as it were, from the surface of the earth. Yet, how many there are who spend their lives in such places for a pittance of the wages which they squander in dissipation. Surely, it is worth four dollars a day to work in these dismal holes. Signed, J. Ross Brown."

NARRATOR: Mining law said that any tunnel which struck a blind ledge of gold could be claimed by that company. Many a tunnel was watched with bated breath as the miners advanced. Each outfit pressed forward with everything they had. Miners felt duty bound to push things to the limit. In the search for things precious, men were willing to take chances. Buried hundreds of feet deep under the mountains, a miner never knew at what bend he might come face to face with death. Even if he escaped a crippling accident, he still faced the possibility of contracting pneumonia or silicosis from breathing in the rock dust.

The mine owners cared little about developing safety measures. Their object was to extract the ore as quickly and cheaply as possible, and even at four dollars a day, labor was cheap. With inadequate brakes and incompetent operators, many a miner lost his life in buckets or cages, free-falling 200, 400, and even 700 feet to the bottom in the mineshafts.

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As the mines grew more complex, miners faced the added challenge of dodging a maze of open holes. More than a few slipped on ice and fell into them, or simply forgot and stepped back into empty space, and that was the last anybody saw of them alive.

Water was a constant threat. Giant pumps worked night and day to pump it out. And where flooding wasn't a problem, bad air could be. But the most feared hazard wasn't water, bad air, or cave-ins. The miners' greatest fear was fire, and worse.

It happened the evening of July 8th, 1879. Two tons of giant powder exploded at the Old Standard Works on the hill. Seven men were dead, several of which were reported vaporized. The shock wave was felt twenty miles away in Bridgeport.

Though miners suffered through the death and mutilation, they had one ally, the Bodie Miners' Union. In June of 1878 a Miners' Union Hall was constructed. The Miners' Union eventually negotiated better working conditions for the miners, but never higher wages. A miner never forgot that while he earned his four dollars, rich men in New York and San Francisco were growing richer.

So the miner lived for the moment, in places like the saloon, dance hall, or opium den.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "How shall I describe it? It's so unlike anything East that I can compare it with nothing that you have ever seen. A hundred men to one woman and child. Saloons, saloons, liquor everywhere, and here the men are. Where else can they be? At home in their cheerless, lonesome hovels or huts? No, in the saloons, where the lights are bright, amid the hum of many voices, and the excitement of gambling; where men are congregated and living uncomfortably; where there are no home ties or social checks. Here one sees gambling and vice in all its horrible realities. Signed, William Brewer."

NARRATOR: The Bodie Standard claimed, "Main Street has more saloons in a given length than any thoroughfare in the world." And indeed it did in 1879, with more than 50 saloons for the miners to drink, fight and gamble in.

Bodie whiskey, also known as "blue blazer," "tarantula juice," and "Bodie lightning whiskey," became renowned throughout the West. Hard drinkers claimed it was made from old boots and scraps of iron, and that a couple of snorts could craze a man with ordinary brainpower. This was obviously true in the case of one John Peters, who, after a rollicking night on the town, headed back to the Standard Lodging House. Staggering off course he ended up at the Blackhawk Mine, whereupon he fell 110 feet down a shaft. Worried friends found him down there two days later, alive and stone sober.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The latter half of Saturday night was a wild one. The consumption of bug juice was something wonderful. Fires were as thick as blackbirds in a rice field. No one had his measure taken for a wooden overcoat however, though the prospect at times looked as if it would develop into a bonanza for the undertakers. Such pleasantries as firing off pistols were frequently indulged in during the night. And the Sabbath dawned while the boys were having a eye of a time generally. *Bodie Morning News*, October 1879."

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NARRATOR: There was the Empire, the Oasis, the Parole, and the Senate, and then there was John Wagner's Saloon at the corner of Main and King Streets.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Grant Smith—Men were judged by their character and their ability, not by the ordinary rules of society. The mining camps had their own Ten Commandments, which included but few of those given to Moses. There would be hundreds of men every night in John Wagner's Saloon. The rear of the room was filled with gambling tables of every kind, principally faro banks, presided over by silent, watchful dealers, with hundreds, even thousands of dollars in gold and silver stacked up in front of them and a gun always within reach. Nearly everybody drank; nearly everybody gambled.

"Boisterous conviviality was the prevailing spirit. Whiskey was the common drink. Beer and wine were too insipid for those tough stomachs, and much whiskey led to quarrelling and gun fighting. Weapons were oftener drawn than used. When a shot was fired, the crowd would make a mad rush for the front doors. Many times John Wagner's front doors were carried bodily out into the street by these stampeding crowds eager to escape flying bullets.

"Fortunately, the fighting was confined to the rough element, and so long as they killed off one another, the better citizens did not care. Every once in a while an innocent spectator would get in the way of a bullet, but that was considered partly his own fault for being there.

"The boys have a reprehensible practice of shooting at targets across Main Street. The diversion not imminently calculated to soothe the nerves of one having occasion to cross the line of fire. The terror thus inspired however is supposed to considerably enhance the fascination of the sport. Signed, James Braley."

NARRATOR: Bodie whiskey, mixed with Bodie's bad men and Bodie's saloons, created a kind of alcoholic delirium that was conducive to protracted shootouts, Bodie-style. Known as Bad Shot Gulch and as a "shooter's town," Bodie's bad men seemed to use up a lot of lead in order to hit anything. In the case of Misters Nixon and McDonald, eight shots were exchanged while they were three feet apart. Only one bullet hit anybody. Called "shooting sensations" by the Bodie press, they occurred with enough regularity to give rise to the oft raised question upon rising, "Have we a man for breakfast?"

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The shooting was kept up for all of an hour, and then Kirgan's "boarding house" began to overflow with arrivals. Both cells were literally packed. As each one was brought in, his person was searched for concealed weapons. There were no less than eighteen knives of all sizes and fifteen guns that could completely demoralize any Eastern man. *Daily Bodie Standard*, August 1879."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "They have some very poor marksmen in Bodie, and some resident undertakers ought to start a shooting gallery here. About two o'clock last Monday morning two men emptied the contents of two six shooters at each other across the counter in the barroom, with no other effect than tapping a barrel of ale. One of the men then retired to the street where he obtained a fresh supply of ammunition, and the firing was kept up until nearly daylight, putting three balls through the glass doors and shooting of a cigar in the mouth of a passing stranger, making the cigar too short to smoke. This indignity

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then caused the smoker to loose his temper, and he woke up the constable, whereupon the firing seized.”

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “Some of the newspapers are commenting upon the number of shooting scrapes that occur in Bodie. Oh, to be sure here is something of a shooting gallery, and there is a man shot before breakfast not infrequently. But, what are we to do? Times are dull, money is scarce, and the weather miserable. Under such a condition of affairs there must be some inexpensive recreation provided for the people. Six-shooters are of no account unless they can be used, and coffins will warp and be unfit for occupancy if allowed to stand a great while in an undertaking establishment. June 1881.”

NARRATOR: The “Bad Man from Bodie” was Washoe Pete, and it was Red Roe, Rattlesnake Dick, or Bill Deegan. Many a town ruff personified the bad men and many paid the full price for a slow draw. Part myth, part reality, the “Bad Man from Bodie” was dangerous only to those who fooled with the rough crowd. The least discriminating killer in Bodie didn’t even use a six-shooter . . .

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “There is no place in the world that the mercury can drop so easy and without fuss as in Bodie. It fell to about twenty degrees below zero Friday night and came up smiling the next day as though nothing had happened. October 1880.”

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “The weather is so cold in Bodie that four pairs of blankets and three to a bed is not sufficient to promote warmth.”

NARRATOR: A more uninviting region would be difficult to imagine. Publishing a newspaper, let alone mining hard rock, could be arduous . . .

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “The printing office is open on all sides, and the snow flies in wherever it pleases. In the morning everything is frozen solid. Then we throw things out and the whole thing is deluged with drippings. It’s hard to set type under such conditions—when the office is dry, it is too cold to work; when it is warm, the printer needs gum boots and oilskins. In fact, it has been a hell of a job to get this paper out. *The Index*, 1880.”

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “The fall of snow is tremendous and a terrific gale from the south added to the discomfiture. The town on Wednesday resembled a Siberian stage station. Not two men could be seen on the streets at any one time. Several times during the day it was reported that miners had lost their way and sank down, exhausted in trying to climb the hill, through three feet of snow on the level, in the face of a raging blizzard.”

NARRATOR: In spring, the snowmelt caused another set of problems. People and animals often got stuck in the bog that was, during better times, Main Street. It took fourteen mules to pull one freight wagon out of the mud. And it was especially treacherous for drunken town derelicts, who sometimes had to be extracted from the muck using a wagon crane. It was so bad one could safely walk across on the ears of mules trapped in the mud, according to one old timer.

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ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The Bodie Silver Coronet Band will give a grand ball in the Miners' Union Hall for the purpose of buying instruments."

NARRATOR: It was a twenty-four-hour-a-day town now. Stamp mills thumped away day and night; the town was never quiet.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Never before in the history of Bodie has there been such a continual round of gaiety among our better class of citizens as at present. There are public balls given by the numerous social and fraternal organizations to such an extent that one has considerable difficulty keeping up with the giddy world. January 1880."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The Fireman's Ball at Miners' Union Hall last night was largely attended by the best people of Bodie. The attendance of ladies was especially large, and many of the toilets would have made a city belle feel a twinge of envy, they were so elegant and tasteful. The arrangements were perfect in their character and reflect great credit on the gentlemen having them in charge. The music was the best that could be provided and the utmost harmony and decorum was displayed throughout. All in all, the Fireman's Ball was one of the pleasantest social events in the history of Bodie. December 1879."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "One of the most fashionable audiences that's ever been seen in the Bodie Opera House attended last evening. Bobby McGlincey needs no comment. Anyone who has heard Bobby with his violin knows that he has no equal. Mrs. Briereley and the singing of "Annie Laurie" and "Coming Through the Rye" was greeted with deafening applause. *Bodie Daily Standard*, July 1879."

NARRATOR: In Bodie the most celebrated day of the year was the Fourth of July.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "Early Wednesday evening the high winds subsided, and Thursday morning the sun rose from behind the hills, beautiful and bright, and the people of Bodie were aroused from their peaceful slumbers by the firing of thirteen guns. At an early hour, the small boys, age unlimited, with crackers and bombs, shotguns and pistols and all the other noisemaking contraptions, began their assaults on the eardrums of the populace, frightening horses, timid ladies, and prowling dogs."

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: "The beautiful old flags were unfurled once more in honor of the grandest nation the sun has ever shown on. At 10:30 am the procession formed near the Miners' Union Hall and marched down Main Street. The spectacle was indeed a beautiful one. With flags flying, the band playing and horses prancing.

"Next came the car of state. A bank all around the car was occupied by thirty-eight little girls representing different states. Like a bouquet of so many little jasmines.

"Thousands of people lined the streets, and greater enthusiasm has never before prevailed, singing and cheering from the balconies and re-echoing from the column, being continuous from the commencement to the ending of the march. *Daily Bodie Standard*, 1880."

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NARRATOR: If every street in Bodie has a story to tell, Bonanza Street would make a novel. Also known as Virtue Street and Virgin Avenue, it paralleled Main Street in the north part of town. Here women of “easy conscience,” whose “days of innocence have fled,” entertained their customers in small cabins conveniently located just behind the saloons and assorted gin joints lining Main Street. Dance halls, also known as “hurdy-gurdies,” were the rage. Here a man could buy a ticket to dance and drinks for himself and a girl, and if he had any money left after gambling, drinking, and dancing, a prostitute was most certain to relieve him of it.

Kate Wise, Nelly Monroe and French Jo, Big Bonanza Number One, Rosa Mae, and Madam Mustache—it was a hard way to make a living; an occupation from which opium addiction and suicide were all too frequent options for relief. Many women died an early death and were buried outside the cemetery; their graves are forever lost.

A Chinatown, rivaling San Francisco’s, sat on the northeast edge of town along King Street. The Chinese sold vegetables, fish, chicken, and pork. They offered laundry services and sold firewood.

Team after team of stoutly burros were pressed into service to satisfy Bodie’s hunger for wood, but it wasn’t enough. So in 1881 they built a railroad whose only purpose was to move wood to the town. With switchbacks steep enough to discourage any other railroad, the Bodie and Benton went ahead and laid track that climbed 2,000 feet in just ten miles. Nearing the top along Bodie Bluff Ridge, it was so steep the engine had to shuttle back and forth pulling three cars at a time. It never carried any passengers, but it hauled all the wood Mono mills could produce—100,000 cords a year.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “Bodie is probably the only city of 8,000 inhabitants in the world which has no church. October 1879.”

NARRATOR: In 1882 Bodie finally got its church—two of them, Catholic and Methodist.

Many an anxious family wrote to Reverend Warrington regarding their sons . . .

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “I do not wonder that you tremble when you think of his surroundings—a sea of sin lashed by the tempests of lusts and passion. Such dissipation as is indulged in here you have never read of in books. Let me give you a table of contents for last week’s chapter in Bodie. On Monday morning a man was lynched for shooting another in cold blood. On Friday two men grappled with each other and, holding fast with left hands, poured shot into each other until one dropped dead; and the other has been expected to breathe his last each hour since. Fill that out with what you must know accompanies it and you have one week in Bodie.”

NARRATOR: Bad shots or not, enough lead had been pumped by 1880 that many men had been killed.

Law-abiding citizens wanted to know how the constable and deputies could let these things happen. The *Daily Bodie Standard* offered a prize to the first person, criminal or otherwise, who could catch an officer out at night patrolling Bodie streets. And of all the murders committed, no one had ever been convicted, partly because witnesses were too drunk to

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remember and partly because a jury of “twelve good men” could somehow never be assembled. Talk of a vigilante committee known as the 6-0-1 surfaced, and on the morning of January the 14th, 1881, it all came to a head. One Joseph DeRoche, angry at the husband of a woman he had been romantically involved with, shot and murdered him in cold blood at the corner of Main and Lowe Streets.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “*Bodie Free Press* - Between one-thirty and two o’clock Monday morning a long line of masked men were seen to file out of a side street into Bonanza Avenue. There must have been 200 of them. Amid loud cries of ‘DeRoche, bring him out, and hurry up.’ Jailer Kirgan appeared and said, “All right boys, give me a little time.” DeRoche’s head was bare and as the bright rays of the moon glanced upon his face, there was a picture of horror visible. He was hurried up a back street to Fuller. The corner of Green was turned, and a halt was made. In front of this place was a huge gallows frame. ‘Move it over to the spot where the murder was committed,’ was the order. And a dozen men carried it to the corner of Main and Lowe Streets. DeRoche was asked by the leader if he had anything to say; he replied, ‘No, nothing.’ ‘Pull him!’ was the order, and in a twinkling the body rose three feet from the ground. While the body was still hanging, a paper was pinned onto his breast bearing the following inscription: ‘All others take warning, let no one cut him down - Bodie 601.’”

NARRATOR: A cardinal rule of mine operations states that exploration should always proceed extraction. Excitement ran so high in 1879 that mining corporations had thrown caution to the wind. Stock capitalization was raised and the massive machinery of mining was hauled in at great expense. Only a few companies ever earned any money for their shareholders.

By 1882 miners in the Lent Shaft had reached 1,200 feet into the earth. The rich Fortuna ledge of gold had played out, and it was evident the Vetta Madre didn’t exist. The smaller mines outside Bodie Bluff and Standard Hill had been pure speculation right from the beginning. What had become inflated gems of corporate red ink began closing: the Red Cloud, the Noonday, the Oro. Stocks once at \$53 a share plummeted to near worthless.

Almost overnight the collapse destroyed the magic of Bodie’s name. Miners were laid off, and Bodie slipped into a deep depression from which it would never recover. Business people of Bodie got the message, and many of them packed up and left for greener pastures.

Now the stages that had been overloaded with newcomers were overloaded with the departing. And no one left faster than the bad men and the easy women. By 1883 Bodie’s north end was already a ghost town. In time only two mines stayed in business: the Bodie and the Standard. In the summer of 1892 Bodie’s worst nightmare became reality.

A kitchen fire spread quickly, engulfing sixty tinder-dry old buildings. By the turn of the century only 500 people could call Bodie home. In 1917 the Bodie Railroad was sold for scrap and dismantled. Bodie edged closer to death as a mining town.

The final nail was driven into Bodie’s coffin in 1932 when toddler, and part-time arsonist, Bodie Bill, got caught playing with matches behind the old Sawdust Saloon. The resulting conflagration almost destroyed the rest of town.

California State Parks Video Transcript

Bodie: Ghost Town Frozen in Time

Of the 1,800 buildings that once populated Bodie, a few were saved.

The structures that exist today passively resist the onslaught of weather, year in and year out.

In the numbing quiet of the cemetery, silent tombstones speak epitaphs to the present generation, telling of the harsh reality of mining camp life, of sacrifices made by the common man.

ACTOR READING FROM A HISTORIC SOURCE: “Grant Smith—It has always seemed to me that one learned more about human nature in a mining camp in a few years than could be acquired in a city in a lifetime. Nothing draws people together like hardships and a feeling of dependence.

“Living conditions in Bodie were crude and primitive to the last degree, but oh the kindly human feeling, the helpfulness, the good fellowship. People were drawn together as I’ve never seen them anywhere else. A friend in Bodie was a friend for life.

“Freedom and independence were in the air, the absence of conventionality sweetened human intercourse. A spirit of youthful enthusiasm animated everybody, such as people have when embarked on a great adventure.”

NARRATOR: Like the old dead skin of creatures that have gone on to better things, Bodie’s building sit; architectural remnants of distant dreams now dead. The hopes and fears of Bodie’s pioneers may have long since passed away, but these remains testify to the collective efforts of past lives now evolved to present-day America. And though Bodie today may be like old discarded skin America has left behind, people the world over return to visit it in ever-increasing numbers. It is our heritage, part of the reason why we are what we are. For nowhere else in America can a person journey back in time so perfectly to a Wild West mining camp as in the true ghost town of Bodie.

Running Time: 59 minutes

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