

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### THE SAWTOOTH & VIENNA MINING DISTRICTS

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The Sawtooth and Vienna mining areas are located high in the Sawtooth mountains, near the headwaters of the Salmon River. The sites are approximately fifty miles southwest of Bonanza, twenty miles northeast of Atlanta, and fifty miles northwest of Hailey, the nearest terminal of the Oregon Short Line railroad from 1883 until 1884 when the line was extended to Ketchum, twelve miles closer to the Sawtooth area.

The camps were opened in 1879, when the news of the rich discoveries of a prospecting party led by Levi Smiley in May, 1879, reached the surrounding mining camps. Three campsites were laid out, in Beaver, Smiley, and Lake canyons respectively, with Sawtooth City formally organized in a miners meeting, November 29, 1879. Boom towns quickly sprang up in the first two, and by 1882, Sawtooth City in Beaver Canyon and Vienna in Smiley's Canyon were both sizeable camps with numerous houses, saloons, restaurants, merchandising stores, meat markets, livery stables, Chinese laundries, assay and real estate offices. A hostile rivalry grew up between the two towns which, since they were only eight miles apart, serviced the same general area. Two distinct mining camps continued to exist even after both areas were in decline.

The Sawtooth camp was developed the earliest. In 1880 the L. D. Cartwright Company of New York City purchased for \$12,000 the Columbia and Beaver prospects in Beaver Canyon, and incorporated into the Columbia and Beaver Company. On the strength of a few tons of rich ore, assayed in New York, the company began extensive development of the area. A toll road was laid out from Sawtooth City to Ketchum; a ten stamp quartz mill, costing \$50,000, was erected above the camp; and a large sawmill was constructed. Over \$100,000 was poured into the camp before a single run of ore was made. Only \$10,000 of this was spent on improving and working the mines. Consequently, when the mills were finished, there was no ore to process. Although the quartz mill was completed in 1882, it did not begin continuous operation until the season of 1886. A combination of difficulties--ores which were so expensive to process that only high grade ores were profitable; bad weather making the region practically inaccessible; and ill-management by company supervisors--cursed the area and the mill remained idle. In 1885, the company was reorganized into the Sawtooth Milling and Mining Company. Under

the supervision of W. S. Venum, the mill was renovated and in 1886, for the first time, ran successfully all season. However, the mill never reopened after this run.

In spite of the difficulties of the Columbia and Beaver Company, several mines in Beaver Canyon were successfully exploited. The Pilgrim produced much of the early rich ores which caused the Sawtooth area to boom. The Silver King began extensive production in 1886, and operated profitably under the guidance of Major William Hyndman. With the exception of the Silver King, the Sawtooth area was nearly dormant and deserted by 1888. A disastrous fire in the Silver King mine in 1892 ended large-scale mining at Sawtooth. The total production of the area is estimated at \$250,000.

The Vienna mining area was much more successful than its neighbor. The Vienna mine was purchased by an eastern company in 1880 and incorporated into the Vienna Consolidated Mining Company. Under the skillful direction of Chris Johnston, the camp rapidly grew into a prosperous community. By 1883, a twenty stamp mill was turning out \$40,000 to \$50,000 per month from the ores of the Vienna Company mines, principally the Vienna and Mountain King. The mill ran steadily until May, 1885, when it shut down pending settlement of a lawsuit, filed by the adjacent Lion Company, over a contested claim. Even though the suit was apparently settled amicably, the Vienna Company never again enjoyed the prosperity of the 1882-85 period. In 1888, a crew of men attempted to run a tunnel through the Vienna mine to the Boise side of the hill. The investment failed to pay off and thereafter only scattered shipments of ore were made from the area. In 1917, the Vienna Company reacquired control over the mines, built a new mill, and established a new camp, but to no avail. The mill was never run, and the area, which had produced over half a million dollars worth of silver, sank into ruin, as the neighboring Sawtooth area had done just a few years earlier.

[Prepared by Nancy Miller]