

Mining and Smelting

Mining for precious metals was foremost in the minds of Cabeza de Vaca and Coronado when they explored New Mexico in the 16th century. They reported seeing and hearing about fabulous deposits of gold and silver that sadly failed to materialize when experienced miners appeared on the scene. The first mining activity of economic significance was copper extraction in the southwest corner of the state in the early 1800's, but Apache raids caused repeated interruptions that continued until the 1880's.

In Socorro County the early prospectors and miners sought gold and silver with some success on the western slope of the Magdalena Mountains near Kelly and the eastern slope of the San Mateos at Rosedale. Silver was also found in the Socorro Mountains, but the small deposits of precious metals in all of the local areas were soon exhausted. In 1882 the Kelly Mine was purchased by Gustav Billing who built a smelter in Park City, a suburb of Socorro. Silver and lead were produced until 1904 it was found that the lead-silver carbonate ores in the Magdalenas were surrounded by much larger and more valuable deposits of zinc carbonate (smithsonite).

In 1904 the Graphic and Waldo mines were sold to the Sherwin Williams Paint Co. and the Kelly mine was sold to the Tribullion Mining and Smelting Co. Thereafter, zinc was the major mining product.

At first, ore was transported by oxcart from the Magdalena Mountains through Blue Canyon to the Billing Smelter southeast of Socorro Peak. Soon afterwards the AT & SF Railroad built a line between Magdalena and Socorro for the principal purposes of transporting ore and livestock.

In recent times the only mining activities have been a manganese mine a few miles west of Socorro that closed in the late 1950's and a nearby surface mine for perlite, a mineral which expands to very low density on heating and is used in insulation and in concrete aggregate.



The Graphic Mine in the Magdalene Mountains. The hooded figure beneath a tree at right is probably Myscie, wife of photographer, Joseph E. Smith.



Prospectors camp, probably in the Magdalena Mountains



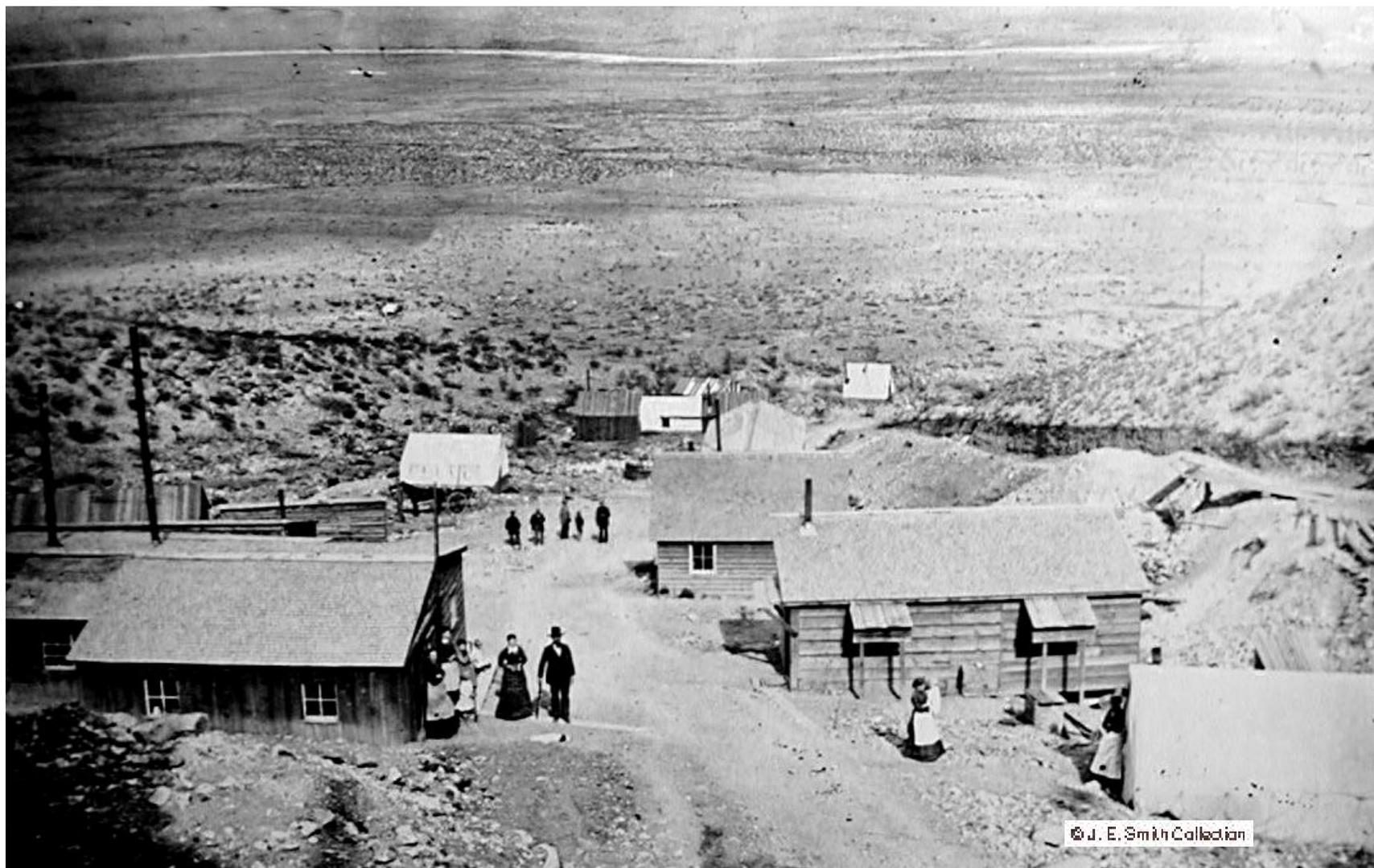
Kelley (aka Kelly), New Mexico mining town



Flash-lit photo inside Kelly or Graphic mine



A stope inside the Graphic or Kelly mine



Merritt mining camp on east side of Socorro Peak. Note that the Rio Grande flood plain in background is barren in contrast to present-day forestation and agriculture.



Boarding houses of the Torrance mine. Note that Socorro Peak has no "M".

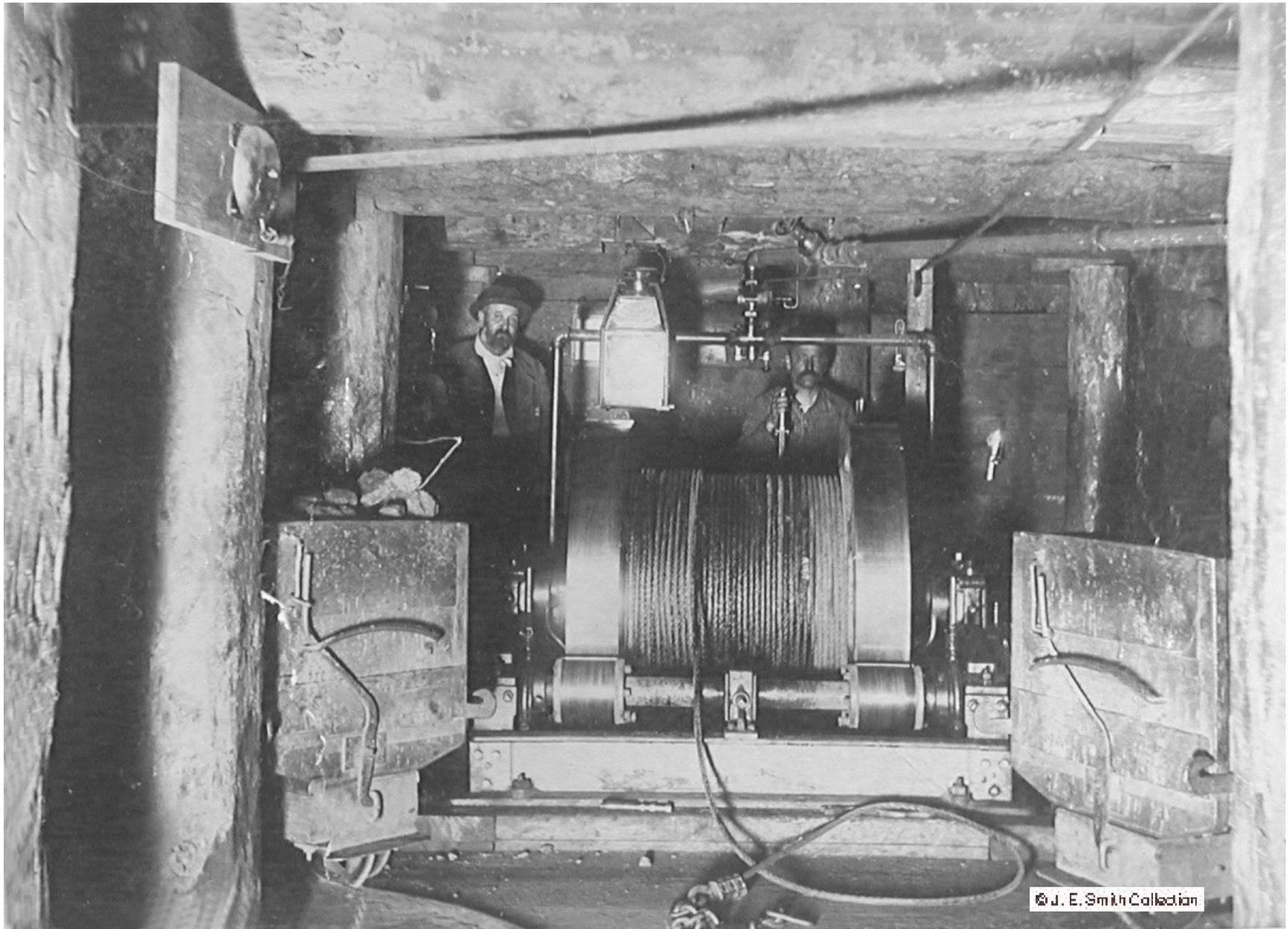


© J. E. Smith Collection

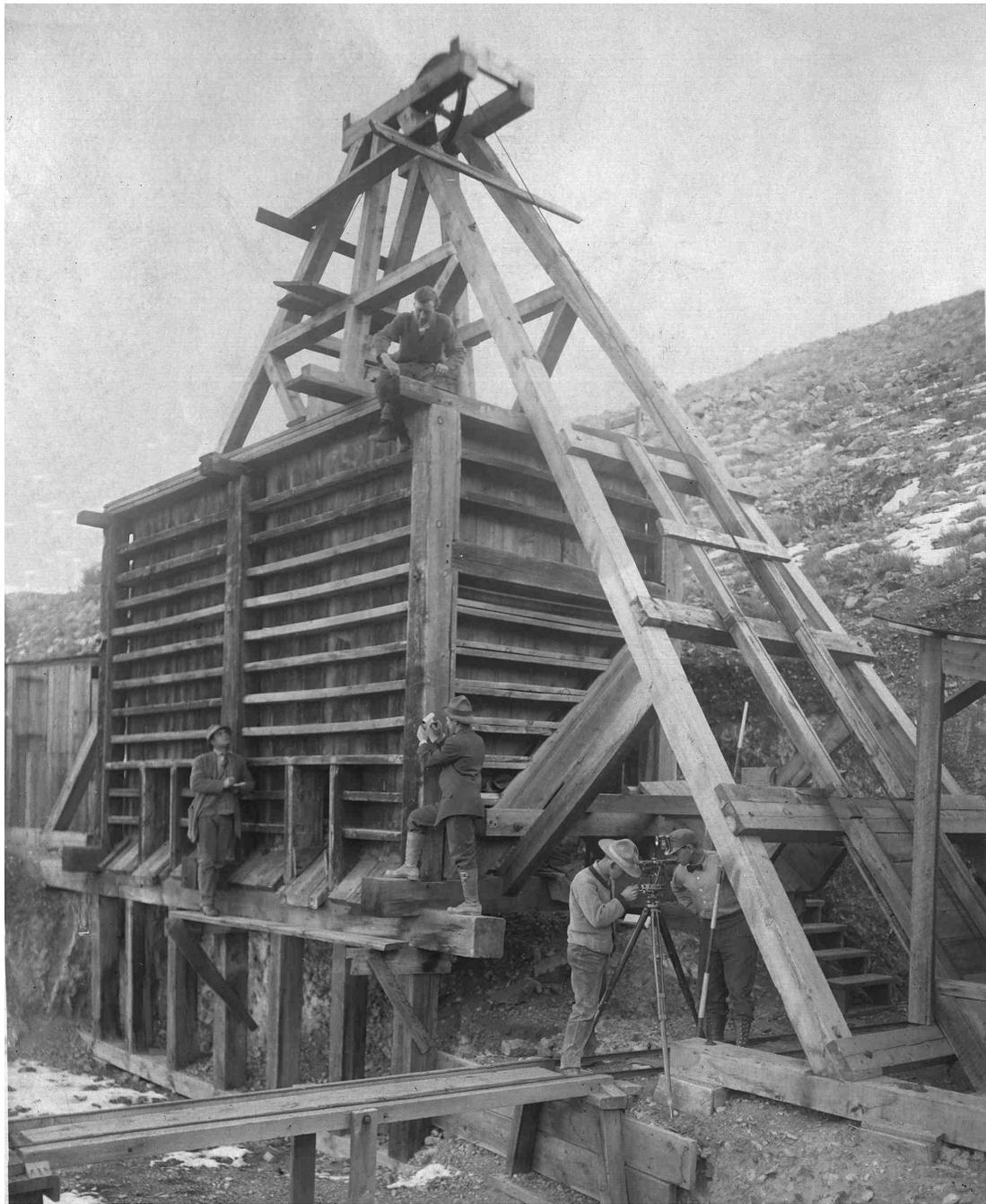
The Graphic mine in the Magdalena Mountains



The Graphic Mine



Mine hoist at a track junction probably at the beginning of an incline



Head Frame at Kelly



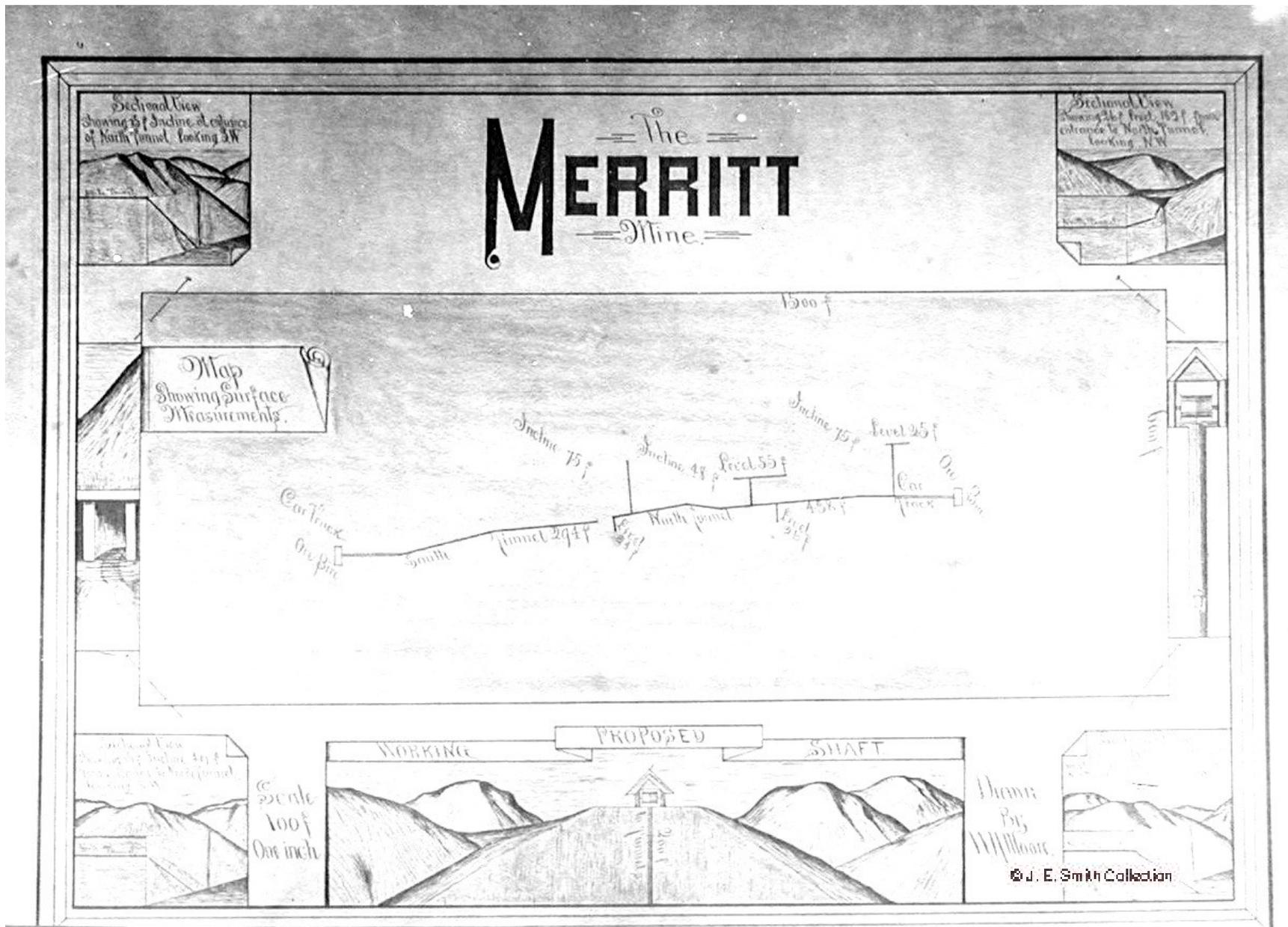
© J. E. Smith Collection

1890 SUMMER CAMP HARDSCRABBLE MINE MAGDALE
WALKERS CAMP

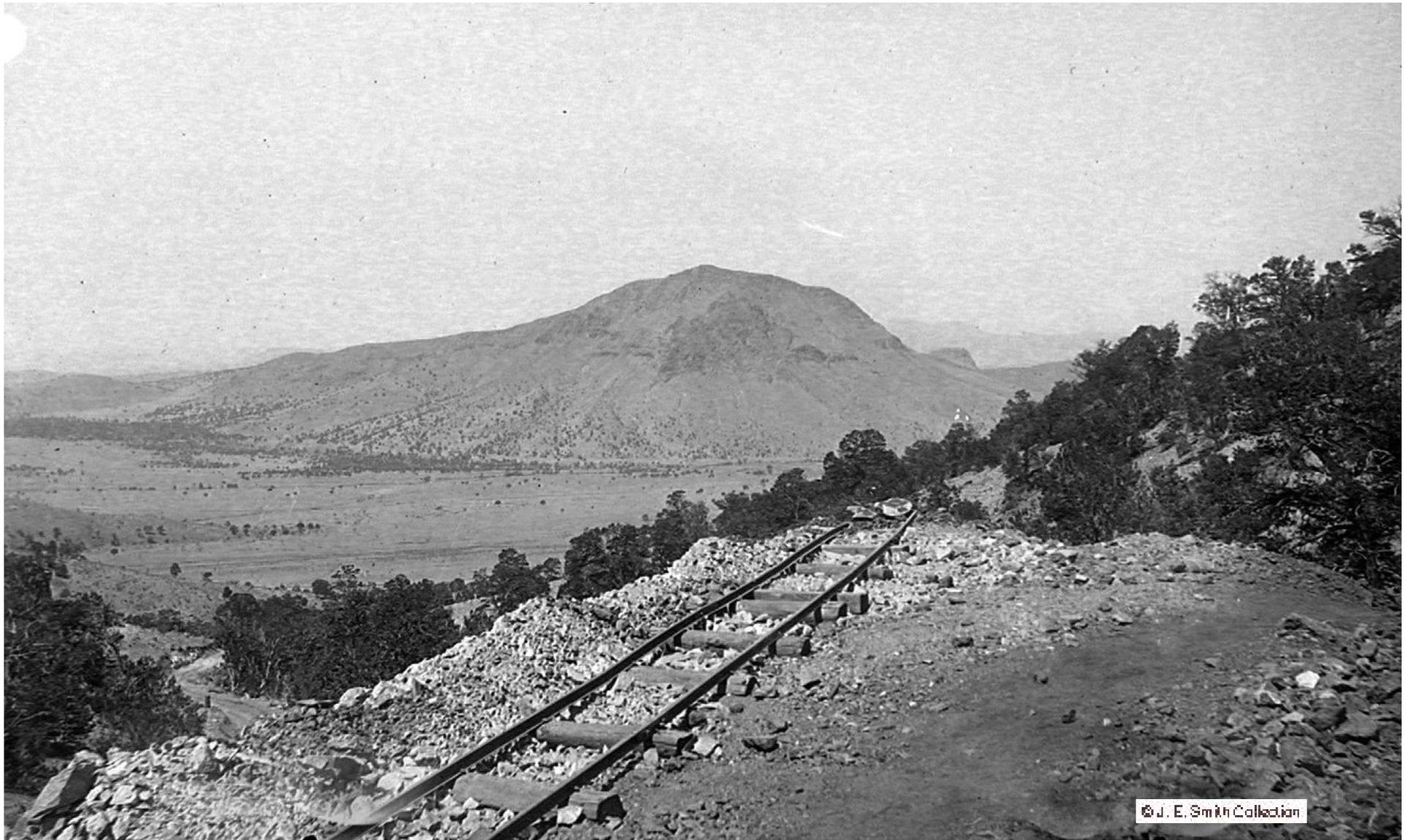
Caption is self-explanatory. Note date of 1890.



The mining town of Kingston, Sierra County, New Mexico



Rare example of a mine map



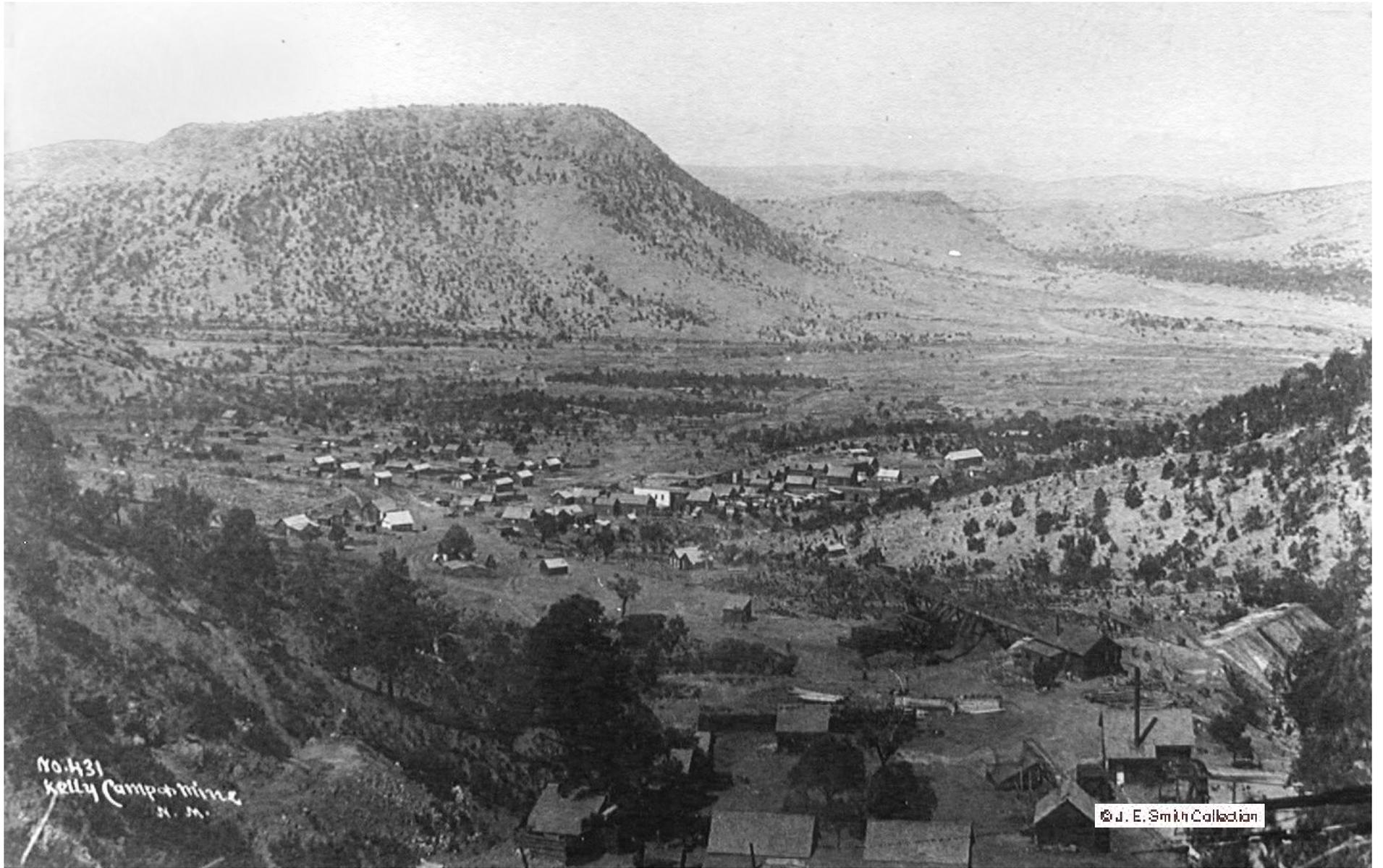
Mine track. Note Magdalena Peak in background.

J. E. Smith studio portrait of boy with mining tools

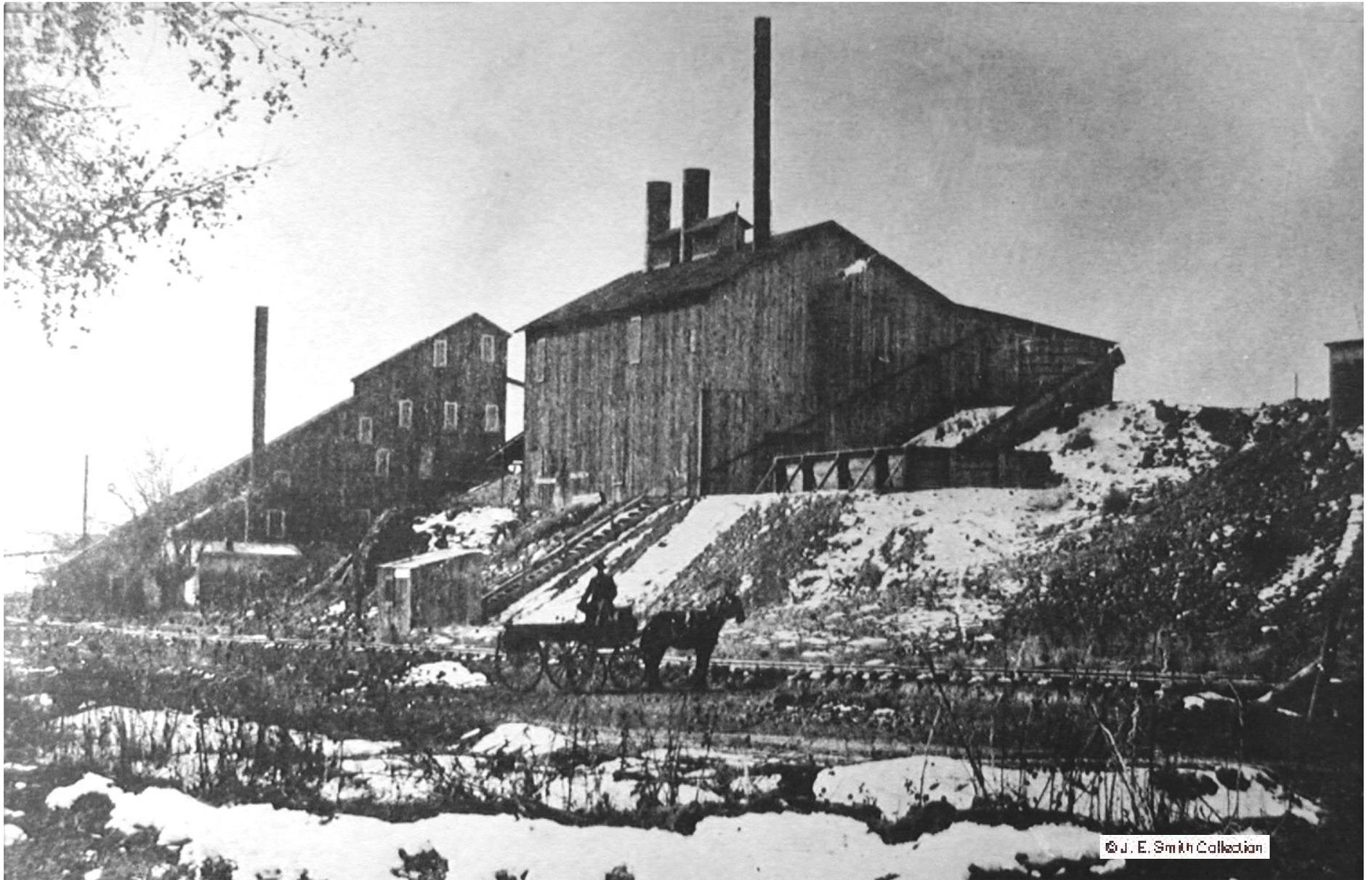


© J. E. Smith Collection

Torrance mining camp, Socorro Peak. Children in foreground are probably Smiths.



Kelley, New Mexico (called Kelly on caption)



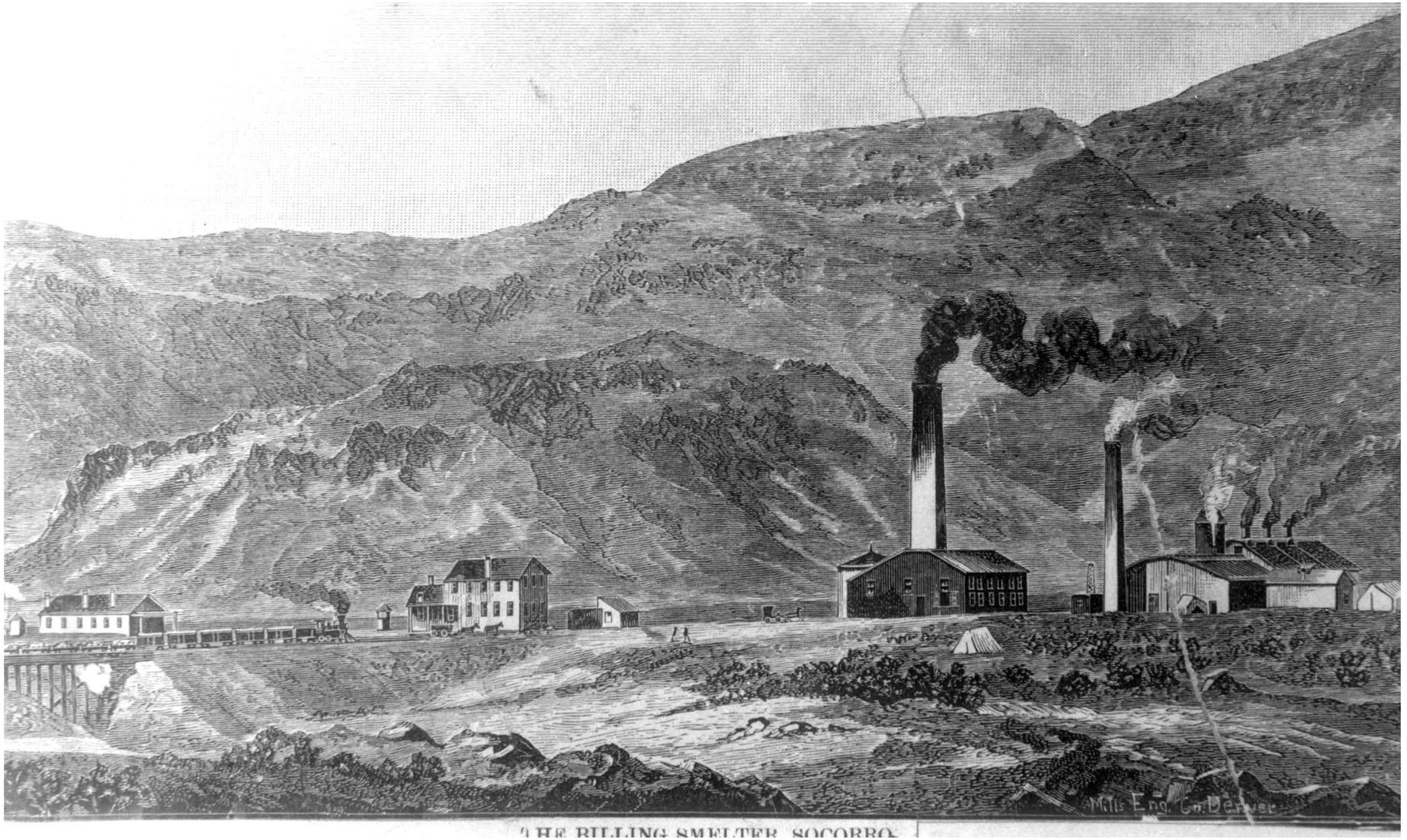
Stamp mill, Cuba Road, Socorro



Billing smelter, Park City



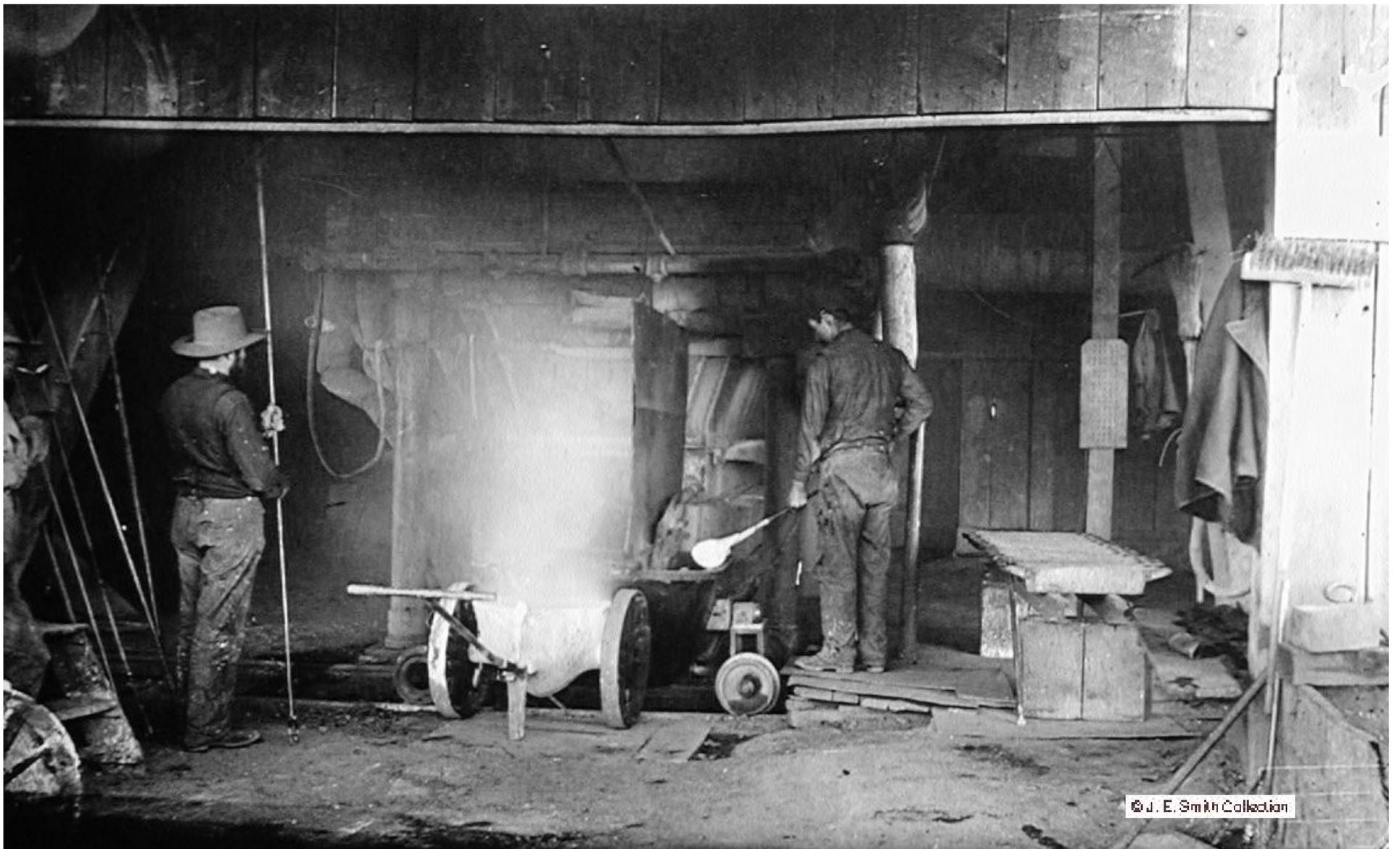
Billing Smelter, Park City



Artist's Rendition of Billing Smelter



Park City

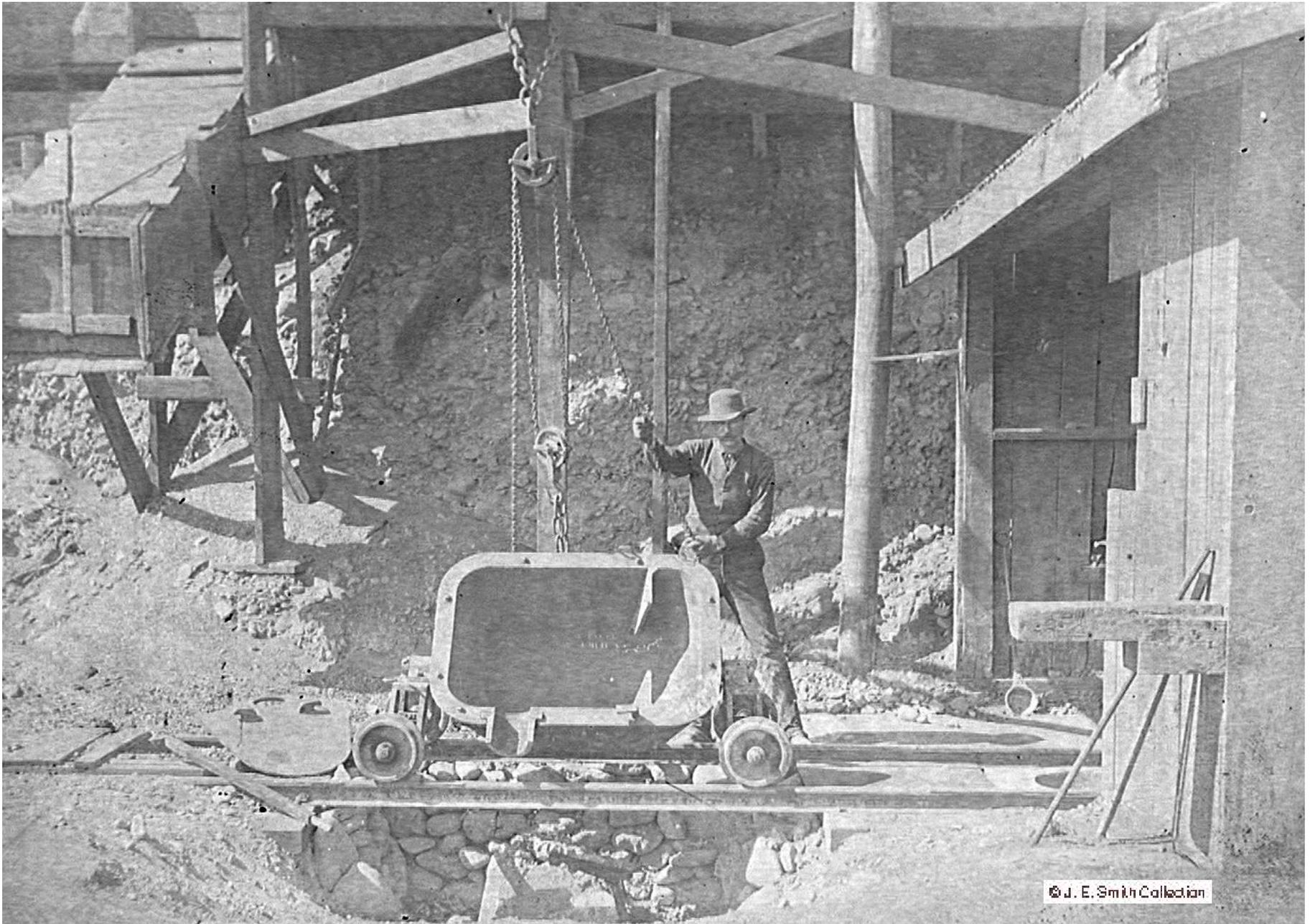


Interior of Billing smelter



© J. E. Smith Collection

Billing smelter, ladle



© J. E. Smith Collection

Billing smelter, ladle and mold



Coal Miners at Carthage



Steam Engine at Carthage Mine