

Here You Are: Real GOLD DIGGERS

Rocky Mountain Valleys Are Dotted
With Claims Where Women
Actually Are Working and
Supervising the Mining of
Yellow Metal—And
They Are Successful



Mrs. T. W. Wheat studied gold mining at the Sacramento Gold Mining School and now manages several claims. She is here showing a woman companion some "color"



Miss Mary E. Smith, of Lewiston, Calif., is the only woman gold dredge manager working on the rivers of the Golden State

By F. Leland Elam

DUST lies deep off the pavement; prospector holes peer from manzanita-covered hills; but the sleepy ghost towns of the early gold mining days in Western United States no longer are sleepy—they're pulsing to a new golden thrill. A thrill created by that flashing, yellow, hard-worked-for metal, gold.

Hundreds of men, many of them with their families, are moving into these old towns, building new homes or occupying old ones, long vacant. These men are on the search for gold or else have taken a job with some mine. Among these men is a new type of gold seeker, women.

There are women who are successful as steamship captains, doctors, lawyers, building contractors, baseball players, tennis players, explorers, Governors, legislators—others of the fair sex have pioneered in aviation, but with all the infiltration of women into various lines of business, the one line we would least expect to find headed by a woman is that of mining.

Mining today, generally speaking, is different from in the eighteen-hundreds when gold was discovered in California. Today as a whole it is carried on with giant machinery specially designed to mine deposits in large quantities. Of course, some mining is still carried on by the use of the rocker, gold pan and sluice boxes. No matter what the method today, it is still a man's job, as in the days when gold was first discovered.

One of the modern methods of digging deep into old stream channels to take out gold is the dredger. Surely a gold dredge is far too masculine ever to become affected by the feminine touch. Maybe that's what you think.

BUT the dredging field, too, has come under the spell of at least one young woman, and today she is endowed with the title of the only woman operator of a gold dredge in the world. She is Miss Mary E. Smith, of Lewiston, Trinity County, California.

Miss Smith took over the active management of the Trinity Dredging Company in 1926, three years after the death of her father and the settlement of his estate. During the interim the company had been managed by her brother, E. L. Smith, Jr. His interests lay more with dredge design and building than operation, so he retired as active head of the company in favor of his sister.

Miss Smith's first task was the rebuilding of the old dredge, which had been in constant use for thirteen years. A new hull was installed and the machinery transferred to it, the dredge resuming operations in the Spring of 1926.

This dredge had been originally built by her father in 1912, and differed from other California dredgers inasmuch as it was especially designed as a sluice type, to handle the coarse gold found in the Trinity River. There is no stacker in the rear, but a type of placer sluice over which the gravel is washed for the recovery of the gold; the debris and tailings pass out over a rock chute at the side of the dredge.

While this method would be con-

sidered crude in other localities, the coarse gold of the Trinity River does not need finer recovery methods.

Miss Smith's dredge has a digging depth of thirty-nine feet and uses eleven cubic foot buckets. In order to dig into the bedrock of the region of operation, the buckets are wide-mouthed and linked at widely spaced intervals on the bucket line.

To date the Trinity Dredging Company has dredged about 450 acres of property, following the spotty placer geology of the district. More than half of this acreage has been dredged under Miss Smith's supervision.

There are from sixteen to eighteen men steadily employed on her dredge. From 80,000 to 100,000 cubic yards are handled monthly.

Provided additional property can be acquired, Miss Smith intends to remain in the dredging business as long as she has a dredge to operate. And, from the present indications, that means a long time, for this woman fails to regard her choice of a career as unique. To her, gold dredging is just a business enterprise to which she has been able to adapt herself profitably.

ANOTHER woman miner is Mrs. Ruth B. Frazier, a former resident of San Francisco, Calif., and niece of Congressman Clarence F. Lea, of Santa Rosa, Calif. She thinks mining is a lot of fun, and she doesn't mind the hard work a bit. Eventually, she believes, the mine she is developing on the old Saucerman properties near Georgetown, Calif., will net her a nice fortune.

"It is not just because I expect mining to make me some money that I think it is fun," she said. "To make my story complete I must go back four years. I found myself in poor health, caused by a highly nervous state of mind. My doctors advised me to get into the outdoors away from people, or at least the crowds in the large cities.

"I had never lived a life in the great open places before, but always feeling competent to do anything, I set out with my two children, Donald, now 15, and Ruth, 18. Eventually, after working hard to build ourselves a home, I took up mining.

"Sure, it was hard at first, but now

you cannot get me away from it. I love our mountain home and so do my children. Some day we will build ourselves a larger house. I don't mind the work any more. I have my health back. I have muscles in my arms, enough to knock any man down.

"Strangely enough and unknowingly, I returned to the old haunts of my grandfather, James E. Lea, who came to Georgetown in the early fifties and made a fortune out of mining.

"Upon arriving at the site of my present home my children and myself set up a modest camp. We then went about building ourselves a log cabin. We cleared the land of manzanita and chaparral. At first the work was so hard for us that we could saw and chop down but six tough manzanita trees in one day. Later we were able to work

all day cutting many of the shrubs from the land where our home was to stand. "Eventually we completed our present home. It was new health and strength gained by work on the cabin that turned my thoughts to mining."

STARTING as a society woman looking for health, she found it and now doesn't care a thing about the big cities. She can now muck 110 buckets of rock and dirt, each bucket weighing 200 pounds, in a day. She has broken as much as six tons of rock in a day. She drills her own powder holes, using an auger for soft materials and a hand drill for rock, fills them with powder and does her own shooting.

Near Grass Valley, California, a woman has proved that the sentimentality and the faith of a man in his

old home place were well founded. She has made it possible for that faith to be remunerative far beyond this man's wildest dreams.

Thirty years ago George Icard left Grass Valley for the Philippine Islands, where many mines are now under his control. Then, and since, he has had the ambition to establish a mine on the family homestead in the Rough and Ready district.

Icard left for the Philippine Islands to make his fortune at mining when a youth. Throughout the years, through bad fortune and finally through good, he retained control of the Icard Ranch for sentimental reasons as well as the belief the property would prove valuable.

Continually he poured money into the property until \$30,000 had been spent trying to develop a mine on the ranch. Many mining men tried but failed.

A few months ago his niece, Mrs. Joan Icard Kelly, took charge of the work at the Icard Ranch Mine. She took steps to prove that her uncle's faith was well founded. It was her belief that the work was being carried on in the wrong place.

SHE put diamond drills to work on another section of the land. A rich ore vein at about the 100-foot level was contacted, assaying at times as high as \$34 a ton. Ore from \$2 to \$3 a ton in diamond drilling is considered good.

There are many other stories of the activities of women in mining. There is Mrs. George Morgan, wife of one of the partners operating the Davey Mine at Garden Valley, California. She has helped her husband develop this mine from a mere prospect into an active producer.

She was helping the two men when they encountered rich ore in the bottom of the 120-foot shaft. She panned \$700 in gold out of a small quantity of quartz in less than an hour.

Recently George William Smith, of the Bennett Company at Etna, Calif., displayed a \$450 turtle-shaped gold nugget. It was found by Mrs. M. Elch, near the Bonnelly placer mine on the Salmon River, where she had been mining with her husband for several weeks.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Burns were convinced there was still loose gold to be found in Southern Oregon, so they went there a few months ago from Oklahoma to learn prospecting.

Mrs. Burns took her turn with her husband, shoveling gravel, working the rockers and cleaning the sluices, besides doing her housework.

While thousands in Oregon and California make only a meager living, a few make exceptional finds. Mrs. Burns is one of those few. While panning a gravel deposit she uncovered a nugget which brought her \$1015.

One of the most notable as well as unusual small gold mines in Amador County, California, is one operated by

the Peterson family, six miles east of Jackson, near Pine Grove. From a chance piece of quartz found by William Peterson the mine developed into a bonanza producer.

They found gold from the very grass roots. Instead of chicken farming, the entire family, even the women, turned to mining. The mine was operated as a family vault or private bank.

If either Mrs. Peterson or her daughters needed a new dress all they had to do was go in the mine, break off a few pieces of the quartz and mill the gold out of it. Through their help the mine was gradually developed to the extent that men could be hired to do the work and machinery bought to grind up the rock and extract the gold.

THEN there is the Golden Aster mine near Hot Springs, Ariz. Visitors at this mine have seen at work, setting ore, a well preserved woman of 70. She is Mrs. C. E. Champin, owner and superintendent of operations, working three men bringing up gold from levels down to 500 feet.

Fifty-five years ago she and her husband rode a stage from Texas into the Hot Springs country and there she has lived since.

She has reared ten children. Two grandsons still work the "Little Joe Mine," the first claim staked out by their grandfather.

She has remarked: "I learned about mining by going with my husband in those early days. It was lonesome and dangerous in the camp.

"There was the menace of prowling Indians in the days before Geronimo was captured, but afterward more real damage was done by his former allies, Mexican bandits."

THERE are many records of women owning mines, among which are Mrs. Dades Dell Davis, of Hollywood, owner of the Sunshine and Last Chance Mines in Plumas County, California, which are planning to open in the near future, and two twin sisters, Miss Maxwell and Isabella Diestel, who some time ago took over placer mining claims on the mouth of Middle Creek near Redding, Calif., calling them the Maybell and Isabella mines.

Mrs. Elmerie Morgan, of Placerville, Calif., not only owns a half interest in the Three Queens Mine but she is the superintendent of the project.

The operation of the mine, which is located four miles from Forest Hill in a rich mining district, is completely under her personal direction. Nattily attired in boots, breeches and white sweater, she directs fourteen men in operating the ten-stamp mill, two plate and concentrating tables and mining operations on the 85, 100 and 270-foot levels.

Mrs. Morgan is the queen of the Three Queens Mine, and she rules it like a queen. At present she is planning to expand her operations to Butte, Mont., where she is interested in a 12,000-acre gravel claim.