



## VIRGINIA CITY FACT SHEET

**LOCATION:** At 6,200 feet on Mount Davidson, historic Virginia City is 25 miles from Reno and 45 miles from Lake Tahoe. Like many cities in Nevada, Virginia City was a mining “boomtown” with more than \$400 million in gold and silver mined. In today’s prices, that’s more than \$20 billion dollars.

**HISTORY:** The 19th century mining bonanza turned Virginia City into the most important industrial city between Denver and San Francisco, and it turned destitute prospectors from all over the world into millionaires. They built mansions, hospitals, churches, opera houses and schools and imported furniture, fashions and entertainment from Europe and the Orient. The riches helped finance the Civil War and went on to build empires around the world, including San Francisco, a city built with Comstock silver. While the Virginia Truckee Railroad transported bullion from the rural highlands of Virginia City to Carson City, the *Territorial Enterprise*, with literary whiz Mark Twain, delivered news of the day to the vibrant mining metropolis of 20,000 citizens at its peak.

**VIRGINIA & TRUCKEE RAILROAD:** Virginia City is home to the historic Virginia & Truckee Railroad, Nevada's most famous short line that connected Reno with Carson City, Virginia City and Minden. Operating for 80 years, the V&T was Nevada's Bonanza Railroad as it hauled valuable Comstock ore to quartz reduction mills located at Silver City and along the Carson River. In 2009 a \$30 million expansion was completed on the V&T Railroad. The V&T now connects Carson City to Virginia City on the historic long line for weekend trips and offers daily round trips between Gold Hill and Virginia City.

**VIRGINIA CITY MUSEUMS:** Virginia City's history is widely celebrated downtown with a multitude of museums featuring Mark Twain's writing, bonanza king and telecom giant John Mackay, the critical importance of police and fire, the connection with famous Courtesan Julia Bulette and the role of a Civil War general.

- ***The "Way It Was Museum":*** A trip back in time shows how things that mattered in life worked for Virginia City. See the works of milling and mining with old Cornish pumps and check out costumed mannequins, mineral collections, a fully equipped blacksmith shop, rare photographs and information on the Sutro tunnel mule train. The tunnel, created by San Francisco investor Adolph Sutro in 1869, was designed to ventilate the mines, drain water and provide escape for miners.
- ***Historic Fourth Ward School Museum & Archives:*** Opened on Nov. 28, 1876, the Fourth Ward School was built to honor the nation’s centennial. With the ability to accommodate more than 1,000 students, it boasted state-of-the-art heating, ventilation and sanitation systems, as well as water piped to all floors. From the turn of the century through the 1920s, Fourth Ward teachers educated hundreds of students, but the declining fortunes of the mining district and diminishing population caused the student body to shrink. Today, visitors tour the historic school, view the rotating exhibits, search the archives and learn about the rich history of Virginia City and the Comstock Lode. The museum is open May – October.
- ***LEC #1 Comstock Firemen's Museum:*** Public safety was tested during the Comstock time and time again – including the Great Fire of 1875, which leveled much of the town. The volunteer firemen of the Virginia City area were members of a system dating back to the first American Fire Co. organized by Benjamin Franklin. The museum is open May – October.

- **Piper's Opera House:** Built in the 1880s, Piper's Opera House attracted famous stars from Europe and the United States and is listed by the League of Historic Theaters. One of the most significant vintage theaters on the West Coast, this stage once welcomed President Grant, Buffalo Bill, Al Jolson and Mark Twain. Today Piper's Opera House is a sought-after Performing Arts Center. Theatrical performances, concerts, non-profit events and more continue to keep this historic house alive. Self-guided tours are available.
- **Saint Mary's in the Mountains Catholic Church & Museum:** Having been preserved during and since the Great Fire of 1875, St. Mary's in the Mountains is a beautiful Catholic church and arguably the most prominent historical structure and institution in Virginia City. Built by "Paddy" Manogue in 1870, St. Mary's is the oldest Catholic church in Nevada and reflects a late 19-th century culture. Aside from offering Mass every Sunday at 11:30 a.m., St. Mary's is open to the public for free tours of the museum and wine cellar. Numerous church artifacts and photographs are on display as well as a gift shop that supports the small parish and restoration projects.
- **Silver Terrace Cemeteries:** The Silver Terrace Cemetery and the Gold Hill Cemetery are a series of terraces dramatically located on a steep, windswept hillside of Virginia City. In both the Silver Terrace Cemetery and the Gold Hill Cemetery, nearly every plot is fenced or bordered, a typical practice of the Victorian period. The characteristic features of these burial places reflect the breadth of styles and designs popular during their long history. Grave markers range in materials from wood to metal to cut stone. The inscriptions on the markers give silent testimony to the social and economic fabric of both Virginia City and Gold Hill. The cemeteries are open to the public every day from 8 a.m. until dusk.
- **The Mackay Mansion:** Built in 1860 by George Hearst, the Mackay Mansion offers a unique look into Nevada's past. The mansion was once the home of one of Virginia City's "Silver Kings," John Mackay. It is now one of the few remaining original structures that survived the Great Fire of 1875 and one of the few buildings with original furniture, carpet and wall papers. Visitors are welcome to step back in time and tour the Victorian mansion every Saturday and Sunday.
- **St. Mary's Art Center:** Built in 1875, St. Mary's Art Center is a National Historic Landmark. Originally a hospital for the Comstock miners, the building was left empty and abandoned for many years after the gold and silver rush declined, only to be saved in the 1964 and transformed into the cultural arts retreat center and museum it is today.
- **Additional museums:** Comstock Gold Mill, Comstock History Center, The Marshall Mint Museum, Courthouse Slammer and County Museum.

**CEMETERY GIN:** For many years, Virginia City, Nevada, has been having fun with the "Cemetery Gin" name using it as part of a tall tale from the Comstock's rich mining days of the 1850s. No more. Spearheaded by the Virginia City Tourism Commission, the gin is a product of Comstock Distillers. A Nevada born spirit from the town that helped bring Nevada to statehood just over 150 years ago, the gin's signature ingredient is Nevada pine nuts found exclusively from the region. The bottle design was birthed under the premise that it needed to stand out from other gin products and be highly desirable. To accomplish this, it is designed in deep black with gold accents, a peep-thru window displays a vintage 1850s horse-drawn hearse. The product is available for purchase at the Virginia City Visitors Center and several retail outlets throughout northern Nevada. For every bottle sold, Virginia City gives \$1 to the Comstock Cemetery Foundation for preservation and restoration purposes.

**HAUNTED:** Virginia City boasts its notoriety of being one of three of the most haunted towns in the United States, along with Savannah and New Orleans. Other worldly "haunts" exist during Halloween as Virginia City celebrates its history and offers safe trick-or-treating for kids at local shops.

Guided ghost walking tours of the town are offered daily from May through October. One tour, Bats in the Belfry, starts each tour at the haunted Washoe Club where guests can also get a chance to experience the supernatural in a comfortable hotel room for \$50 to \$125 per night.

**LODGING:** Virginia City and Gold Hill, the area known as the Comstock, have more than 200 rooms available for travelers to stay. Spend the night in the Silverland Inn & Suites or one of several quaint bed and breakfast inns.

- **Bed and Breakfasts:** The "B" Street House Inn, originally built in 1875, underwent an award-winning restoration in 2007 and is now a three-bedroom guest inn opening in February for the 2021 season. After the Great Fire of 1875 burned down most of Virginia City, Herman J. Harris bought the lots on where the Cobb Mansion is located and built a home that now serves as the property and a luxurious bed and breakfast, which is open year-round. The Howard Street Home, originally built in 1859 by George Hearst, was once the Gould & Curry Mining Company office.
- **Hotels and Motels:** Clean and comfortable with a Victorian flavor, hotels offer modern and historic Comstock flair. Properties include: Gold Hill Hotel, Silver Mountain Retreat, Silver Queen Hotel, Silverland Inn and Suites, Virginia City Motel, Tahoe House Hotel, Sugarloaf Mountain Motel & Market and Comstock Lodge.

**VIRGINIA CITY SALOONS:** No other type of business dominates the landscape of this historic mining town like Virginia City's saloons and restaurants. Many date back to the Comstock period including maintaining the 19th century look and displaying antiques. Noted saloons include:

- **Bucket of Blood:** A friendly competition ensues between the Silver Queen Hotel's saloon and the Bucket of Blood bar on the other side of the street over who makes the best Bloody Mary in town.
- **Gold Hill Saloon:** Located inside the oldest operating hotel in Nevada, Gold Hill Hotel, this saloon is rooted in history, beginning as The Riesen House in 1859.
- **Mark Twain Saloon:** The Mark Twain Saloon is tucked away along the boardwalk, a great little gem located in the Comstock Lode Mining District. It is the only 24/7 spot in town.
- **Ponderosa Saloon:** As mystery has it, the Bank of California walk-in vault of 1864, which now sits in the Ponderosa Saloon, was robbed in 1927 with much of the \$32,000 unrecovered. The money is believed to be hidden in the hills of Six Mile Canyon, once home to large mining and milling operations. The saloon also offers visitors a tour of the underground mine.
- **Red Dog Saloon:** More peaceful, loving gatherings may have come in the 20th century when the likes of legendary rock singer Janis Joplin making an appearance at the Red Dog Saloon in 1968 with the house act Big Brother Holding Co. – which became her backup band after they met in San Francisco.
- **Silver Dollar Saloon:** Best known for its homemade Bloody Marys, \$2 beer and great company, this saloon is as authentic and local as it gets. The narrow stairs lead down to this hangout a level below C Street and it has a back deck that overlooks Virginia City's 100-mile view.
- **Silver Queen:** The Silver Queen Saloon is located inside the Silver Queen Hotel and is the tallest bar in Virginia City. Built in 1876, Silver Queen is home to the portrait of the "Silver Queen," who's dress is inlaid with 3,261 silver dollars and is one of the most famous tributes to the Comstock of the past.
- **The Washoe Club:** It still wields the closest thing to opulence and age in this old western town. The original chandeliers hang from the ceiling at the oldest saloon in Virginia City.
- **Union Brewery Virginia City:** Established in 1863, the Union Brewery resides in the same spot it was in 1875. This historic Virginia City watering hole is ready for you to come up and visit.
- **Other saloons and bars:** Delta Saloon, Old Corner Bar, Virginia City Cigar Bar.

## **MINES & TOURS**

Silver and gold made Virginia City an iconic mining town, one that will forever be recognized as one of the greatest. It also formed the character of Nevada and the nation.

- **Chollar Mine Tours:** With its riches first located in 1859, Virginia City's Chollar Mine (later the Chollar-Potosi) was one of the leading producers on the Comstock. Over the next 80 years, miners blasted and carted out some \$17 million in gold and silver. The Nevada Mill was erected here in 1887 to process the vast amounts of ore taken out of the Chollar Mine. Today the mine is open for visitors. A guided tour lasts a nearly an hour and is a 450-foot, level walk.
- **Ponderosa Mine Tour:** The Best and Belcher Mine is a 40-minute guided tour with more 300 pieces of antique mining equipment on display. See complete underground mine workings including tunnels, crosscuts, drifts, stopes, raises, winzes and shafts.
- **Virginia City Trolley Tours:** The Virginia City Trolley Tours are a 20-minute narrated tour of Virginia City on a trolley or tram. They're a great way to sit back and relax the breathtaking views of the town while learning about the history of Virginia City's most famous landmarks.
- **Comstock Gold Mill:** Virginia City's mining history comes alive with an operating 1860s Joshua Hendy (built in San Francisco) two stamp Gold Mill. See how gold was processed from ore to recovery. Open May through October.
- **Piper's Opera House:** Built in the 1880s, Piper's Opera House attracted famous stars from Europe and the United States and is listed by the League of Historic Theaters. One of the most significant vintage theaters on the West Coast, this stage once welcomed President Grant, Buffalo Bill, Al Jolson and Mark Twain. Today Piper's Opera House is a sought-after Performing Arts Center. Theatrical performances, concerts, non-profit events and more continue to keep this historic house alive. Tours are available.

## **VIDEO SERIES:**

**Below the Surface:** Completed in 2016, this series takes viewers below the surface of Virginia City, introducing them to the characters and living legends who call this place home. [View the series here.](#)

**Women of the Comstock:** Completed in 2021, Women of the Comstock highlights the women who run this town and their importance, dating back to the heyday. [View the series here.](#)

**Special Events:** Virginia City is known for its quirky special events. View the event videos on our YouTube Channel, [here.](#)

## **EVENTS:**

- **February:** Devil Made Me Do It
- **March:** Rocky Mountain Oyster Fry and Saint Patrick's Day Cruise
- **April:** Father Daughter Day & Dance
- **May:** Chili on the Comstock
- **July:** Fourth of July Cruise & Fireworks Spectacular
- **August:** Hot August Nights Kickoff
- **September:** International Camel & Ostrich Races, Street Vibrations Fall Rally
- **October:** Virginia City World Championship Outhouse Races, Hauntober, Hunt for the Spirits
- **November:** Virginia City Veteran's Day Parade
- **December:** Believe Again – Christmas on the Comstock

###