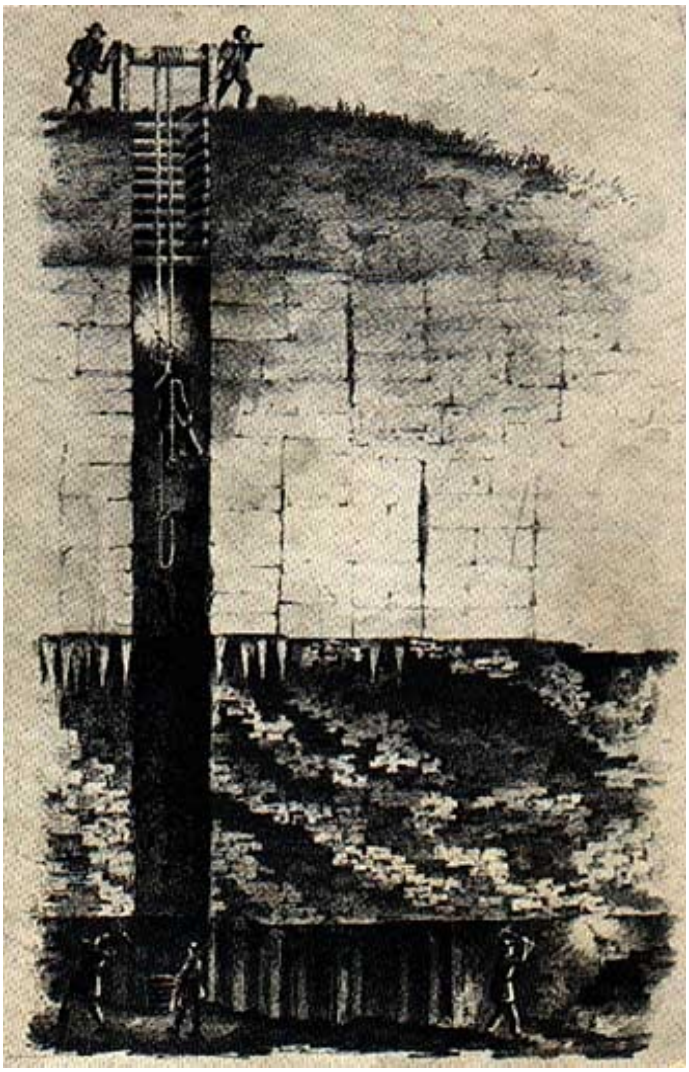


Lead mine in Wisconsin

Lead Mining in Wisconsin

Prepared by Ava L. McCall

Galena

Melting galena to make lead

Lead mining means gathering galena from underground. Sometimes galena is melted down to make lead. Galena or lead can be traded for other goods, sold for money, or used by the people who mine the galena.

Ho-Chunk women at first took galena from near the top of the ground.

Ho-Chunk women mined galena for many, many years. At first, they took galena that was near the top of the ground. Ho-Chunk women gathered galena to use as jewelry. They also melted galena and used it to paint their bodies. Sometimes they buried dead Ho-Chunk people with the best pieces of galena. The Ho-Chunk traded galena for other things from other Native people.

Ho-Chunk women dug tunnels to take out galena.

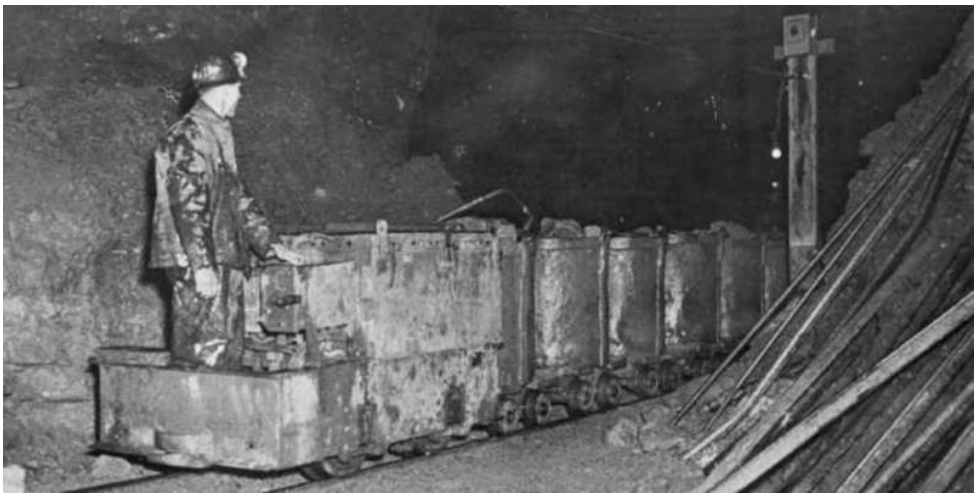
After the Ho-Chunk began using lead for ammunition in their trade guns, Ho-Chunk women began digging tunnels to take out larger amounts of galena. When the Ho-Chunk learned that Europeans wanted galena, they mined more galena to trade with the Europeans.

Lead shot to use in guns

Europeans and United States citizens wanted lead for lead shot to use in guns. They wanted to use lead in making roofs for buildings, toys for children, and paint. Europeans and United States citizens mostly wanted to make money by mining galena and making lead.

Early Wisconsin lead mine made by European and United States citizen miners

When Europeans and United States citizens found out about all the galena on Ho-Chunk land in the early 1800s, they entered Ho-Chunk territory and took out galena they found. By 1825, more than 10,000 European and United States citizen miners moved illegally onto Ho-Chunk lands in southwestern Wisconsin.



Underground lead mine

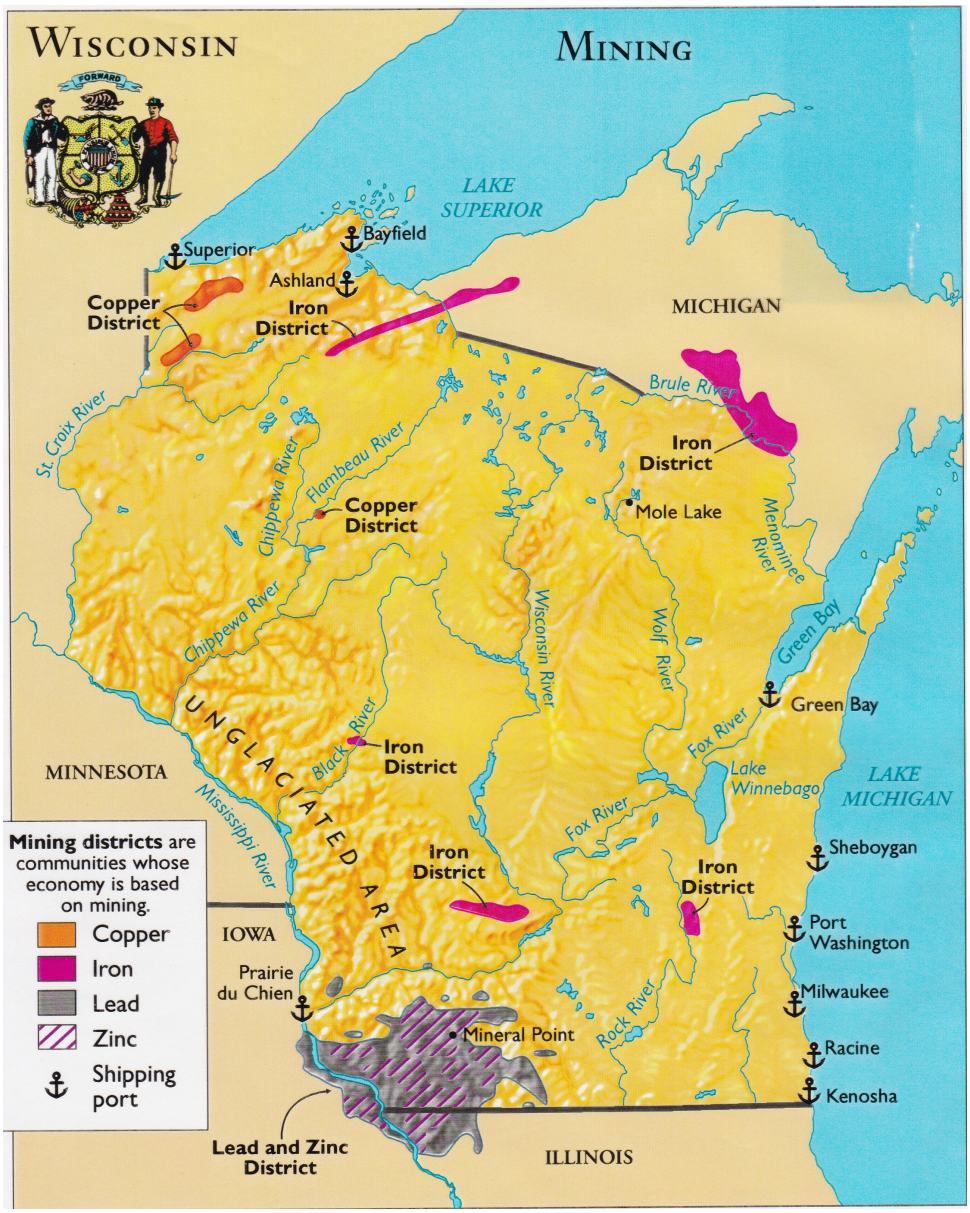
By the 1820s, most of the galena found near the top of the ground was gone. European and United States citizen miners prepared mining shafts several hundred feet down. Some built mining pits as large as 20 feet deep and 20 feet wide. These lead mines greatly changed the top of the ground.

A smelter was used to melt down galena and make it into lead.

European and United States citizen lead miners also built smelters to melt down galena and make it into lead. When galena is melted, sulphur is released into the air. Sulphur smells like rotten eggs. The air around smelters became very polluted with the smell of rotten eggs.

Chief Red Bird

Sometimes there were conflicts between European and United States citizen lead miners and Ho-Chunk people over lead. Red Bird, a Ho-Chunk leader, killed several Europeans who settled on Ho-Chunk land without permission. Red Bird also attacked a boat carrying lead miners. Red Bird was jailed and died in jail.



The gray area shows where lead was found in Wisconsin. This area belonged to the Ho-Chunk when European and European American lead mining began in the 1820s.

The United States government wanted the Ho-Chunk to sell some of their land with galena. Then the Ho-Chunk found out that the United States government wanted all of their land south of the Wisconsin River that had galena.

Mineral Point is a small town in Wisconsin built to provide things lead miners needed to live.

European and United States citizen miners began to mine all year round. Soon small towns were created for the miners. New Diggings and Mineral Point were two lead mining towns.

Early European and United States citizen lead miners dug holes in the sides of hills to live in while they mined.

Sometimes European and United States citizen lead miners dug holes in the sides of hills to live. These holes were called dug-outs. Miners were nicknamed “Badgers” because they burrowed holes in hills to live like badgers did. By 1850, very little lead mining was done in Wisconsin.