

Galena's Lead Mining Era: An American "Boom to Bust" Story

1838 - 1869

Purpose

To illustrate the history of the lead mining town of Galena, Illinois as a proxy for boom and bust mining towns across America, as it can be shown through early mail.

Scope

The exhibit begins in 1838 when mail service began in Galena and ends in 1869 when the Transcontinental Railroad was completed. Stampless and early stamped mail guide the story of Galena's lead mining era.

Background

Today a quaint town of 3,700, Galena, IL had its moment in history. Galena started with a Boom, and the reason was lead. The small town of four square miles was named for the *mineral* galena, a lead sulfide (PbS_2) found in lead ore. In the 1830s, when news of its rich lead mines and cheap land spread, fortune seekers rushed into Galena. Galena became the largest



supplier of lead in the world, and its population grew to 14,000 in the 1850s, making it larger than Chicago.

Galena's Bust

Galena lead supplied Union Civil War needs. After the war, demand for lead dropped dramatically. By 1869, the Transcontinental Railway was complete, a final nail in the coffin. Miners left seeking their fortunes to the west, and western ores could be easily brought to market. The boom town of Galena went bust. By 1870, Galena's main mine closed.

Key items:

- ◆ 1838 Land Registrars Mail & Land Grant document
- ◆ 1840s Transatlantic Mail, letters from Galena to Europe
- ◆ 1850s Sioux Indian Treaty letter and Miner's letter text

Exhibit Plan

A. Finding Lead & Securing Land in Galena	1 - 4
B. Lead Mining Boom in Galena	5 - 10
C. Galena Growth Begets Growth	11-14
D. The Lead Used in the Civil War	15
E. Epilogue: Boom Goes Bust	16

Mineral Galena

Philatelic items bordered in black, significant items are **bordered in red**, display items bordered in gray, *social history text in italics*.

Notice of Investment

Indianapolis investor's \$740.22 processed by Galena's bank.

February 2, 1838

Rate: 50¢ unpaid double the 25¢ rate for distance over 400 miles.

Eager to buy land, investors started the boom in Galena.

