



Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma (Stovall Museum Publication)

Arrell M. Gibson

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Within the first half of the twentieth century the so-called Tri-State mining district of southwestern Missouri, southeastern Kansas, and northeastern Oklahoma experienced boom and bust. Comprising 1,200 square miles, this area was once the world's leading producer of zinc and lead ores. With Joplin, Missouri, as its financial, distribution, supply, and wholesale center, the district included bonanza fields at Galena and Baxter Springs, Kansas, and Commerce and Picher, Oklahoma.

But the deposits were shallow, scattered, and short-lived, and by the 1950s few companies and fewer individuals remained to work what was left. Ghost towns dotted the landscape where once there had been frenzied activity, and the larger towns and cities turned to other business and industry. Yet the unique heritage of the district remains—including the values and traditions of the pioneer miners.

Wilderness Bonanza: The Tri-State District of Missouri, Kansas, and Oklahoma draws on a wide variety of source materials, including personal interviews with former miners, to give the first full account of the Tri-State District's mining history. It describes the geology of the region and the changing methods of prospecting, mining, milling, and smelting, along with evolving labor relations and social and financial conditions. The many illustrations, including some never before reproduced, show the mines, the men, and the equipment they used.

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