

Guided Notes: Mining Booms and Busts

When we hear the word mine in South Dakota, we think of **gold**. Most South Dakota gold came from the huge Homestake Mine at Lead, where miners dug nearly **two miles** straight down beneath their city, through hard rock.

They also called the pink rock granite, but in fact, it was a super-hard stone called **quartzite**. A mine that's open to the sky, without underground tunnels, is often called a **quarry**. It wasn't only South Dakota towns that bought these pavers for streets. In 1889, Sioux Falls Granite Company shipped **62** million pavers by trains to Omaha, Kansas City, Chicago, and **Detroit**. Money was tight all across the **United States** in the 1890s, and cities stopped buying so many pavers. Then, in the early 1900s, something came along that spelled the end of **quartzite streets**.

Boom means plenty of stone or metal is being mined, and people are **paying** good money for it. Bust means the supply of whatever is being mined **runs out** -or, as happened to the Sioux Falls Granite Company, customers **stop buying**.

In 1886, **silver** was discovered here. If you look carefully when you visit the state park today, you can still see where the old **Merrimac Lode Mine** was dug.

Coal is valuable in a different way – because it can be burned for **warmth** and **energy**. By the 1930s, **21** coal mines were in business in South Dakota. Those were hard years: not enough rain, dust **storms**, and once again tight money.

In the **1950s**, another mining product that supplied energy stirred big excitement in South Dakota. There was new technology for making **electricity** at nuclear power plants. For many miners, it cost **more** to drive a truck to Edgemont than they were **paid** for their load of uranium soil.

Gold was discovered in the Black Hills in 1874, by an army expedition led by **George Custer**, and thousands of people rushed to the area, hoping to strike it rich. **George Hearst** wasn't like others hoping to strike it rich. Hearst built an amazing underground world and an equally amazing **community** above ground, thanks partly to his **wife**, Phoebe. In the late **1800s** and early **1900s**, people from around the world moved to Lead for Homestake jobs. They brought **languages**, clothing styles, and customs from England, Italy, Ireland, and eastern European lands they called **Slavic** nations.

Miners had to be careful around **explosives** and powerful machinery. Homestake workers got underground by dropping thousands of feet in big, rattling elevators they called **cages**.

For most of Homestake's history, the United States government set **prices** for gold, and limited who could own big amounts of it. In the 1980s, gold prices were so **good** that several new mines began digging. Even Homestake put some of its miners to work on the surface, in an area next to Lead called the **Open Cut**. The new surface mines began going bust – some because they **ran out** of gold, some because of low prices.

In the year 2000, Homestake said it would close at the end of 2001 – after **125 years**. Today workers take **oil** and **natural gas** out of the ground.