



John William Mackay (1831-1901)

1987 Inductee from Mining's Past

John Mackay was born in Dublin, Ireland. He moved with his family to New York as a young boy and worked as a ship's carpenter apprentice during his teen years. John joined the "49ers" in the rush to the California gold fields by sailing around the Horn in 1851. Mackay worked the placer diggings along the Mother Lode and arrived on the Comstock as a prospector. He supported himself in those years first working as a miner, then as mine superintendent at the Mexican Mine. Mackay began his career as a mine owner by acquiring an interest in the Kentuck Mine, and thereafter joined with his partners to develop a mining empire. The Big Four, as they were called, ultimately controlled most of the Comstock Lode.

These activities made John Mackay one of the richest of the western mine developers, yet it was said that he was best known as the "Boss Miner of the Comstock." With a fortune in hand from the silver mines of Nevada, Mackay invested in diverse businesses and mines in Idaho and Alaska.

Upon his death, the John Mackay estate endowed the Mackay School of Mines at the University of Nevada-Reno. In addition, his private charities were substantial, including gifts to old miners, former President Grant, and to many anonymous beneficiaries.