

THE WORLD'S STRANGEST CITY

A Thousand Years of Toil Have Honeycombed Out of Solid Salt an Entire City.

William G. Fitzgerald, in the Scientific American.

If there is any more surprising monument of human labor than Wieliczka's underground city, when in the course of ages the earth, one would like to know what it is and where it may be found. An out-of-the-world place this in the quiet Carpathian Valley of the Vistula, some miles off the Cracow-Lemberg railroad in Austrian Poland. For ever since railroads came into the world these peasants refused to permit them near, fearing lest the vibration should cause the upper earth to fall in upon those strange, crystal, sparkling streets a thousand feet in the earth, with their little horse railroads, drawn by congenitally blind animals, who may be said never to have been "in the world" at all, as we know it. The origin of the rock-salt mines of Bonohina and Wieliczka is lost in the mists of antiquity. They are certainly known as early as the reign of Bela IV of Hungary, in 1252. During the Tartar invasions they were somewhat neglected, but they were restored to fresh activity by immigrant Hungarians from across the border in the time of St. Kinga.

One thousand years of patient human toil have honey-combed out of the solid salt crust of the earth an entire city at various levels. It consists of an intricate congeries of winding streets and dim, scintillating alleys; of pillared churches; diamond and ruby staircases, restaurants, railroad stations, shrines, statues and monuments and a thousand other wonders—all rough when in the hard, sparkling rock salt crystals, which, lit by electric lights, pierce torches, magnesium flashes or thousands of candles, fairly blaze a world of precious stones.

The Salt City is not only difficult of access, but the Austro-Hungarian Government (it is State property) most jealously guards it; and all workmen are searched several times a day, lest they should be tempted to conceal fragments of rock salt upon their persons. It is not clear why mere salt should be considered so precious, but the fact remains that all workers are searched as jealously as the Kaffirs in the diamond mines of Kimberley.

The entrance is a long, low, ordinary-looking building, containing the administration offices of the mines, and also a small museum of paleontological curiosities, found deep down in remote recesses. Elevators descend the abysses leading to this wondrous city, though many visitors prefer to go down by the long, massive staircase hewn in the solid salt, which flashes emerald and ruby rays at every step.

One naturally asks why an entire "city" was hewn in the salt, more especially the pillared cathedrals, the altars, statues, and the like. And one learns, naturally enough, that all this patient work chiseled out during centuries, is in the nature of votive offering from grateful men, whom the salt has yielded what will seem to us a mere abject pittance, ranging from five cents to twenty-five cents a day! The salt-hewn cathedral of St. Anthony dates from the seventeenth century, and was projected by a pious foreman. Galician miners are deeply religious people. They have their own minister of religion in the depths, and touching prayer services with weird music are held in their rock salt churches. Also they have their own band for festive occasions.

The high altar in the salt "cathedral" is cunningly adorned with twisted pillars, and it is flanked by salt-hewn statues of St. Stanislaus and St. Clement. On the altar steps are carved in ruby-red rock salt effigies of two kneeling monks, and in the background of the altar is a huge salt crucifix, before which stands the Virgin placing the infant Jesus in St. Anthony's arms. This, the most extraordinary church in all the world, contains a salt-hewn pulpit, supported by salt statues of St. Peter and St. Paul, and in a niche below stands a glistening statue of the good King, Augustus II.

Emulation must have been the secret of all this gigantic work. It seems that no sooner was the first shrine chiseled in salt, the first statue carved, than succeeding generations of miners, fired with zeal, resolved to see what they also could do in this strange sculpture. Some three hundred feet away from the cathedral is a most wonderful rock-hewn salt cavern in this wierdest of cities. This is the vast "Salle de Danse," the wonderful Lentow ball room, lit with enormous lustres or chandeliers of wire-hung rock crystals of opalescent hues. These last were added in honor of a visit from the Russian Czar, Alexander I, who (like many other royal and imperial dignitaries) visited the City

of Salt with the palatine of Hungary. This great ball room is over three hundred feet in length and towers dimly to a height of 190 feet. Its walls of salt rock glisten and flash with exquisitely-hued crystals, and there are symbolical statues here and there, representing "Knowledge," "Labor," "Vulcan" and "Neptune," as well as a special throne of state at one end, of course, hewn in the rock salt and kept for the use of the aged Emperor Franz Joseph or the imperial archdukes.

There is a triumphal archway in salt over the entrance to the great ball room, surmounted by a miner saluting, and at his feet is carved in salt crystals the Polish greeting "Szeze se Boze!"—the equivalent of the German "Gluckauf." When ever an old working is exhausted and closed, or a new "street" opened in the subterranean city, the event is celebrated by a great ball in the Lentow saloon. Then it is that hundreds of Galician peasant women, wives and friends of the workers below, quaintly clad as a comic opera chorus, take their partners in the vast, rough-hewn salt cavern while shrill pipes, quaint sounding flutes and sweet violins make merry music as the couples whirl in wild Slavonic dance. Another vast chamber, about 350 feet from the surface, is the Michaelowice Hall on the second tier of the city. Rock salt was dug out of this for forty-four years. It is about hundred feet long, 65 feet wide and 117 feet high. The sides and roof are secured by hundreds of tree trunks, placed one above the other as pillars and strutted together. This reminds one of the terrible accidents that have happened in the city of salt. More than once fires have broken out in the workings and have burned for years, until the wooden props have given out. Or again, the strange, sullen-looking saline lakes, navigated by boats in these dark depths may rise suddenly, probably fed by subterranean springs, and drown scores of these patient hard-working men.

Worst of all, great masses of the rock salt, often weighing hundreds of tons, may fall in avalanches from the domed roofs of the streets or the ceilings of new chambers. One notices that the immense saloons, restaurants, churches and other public buildings hewn in salt, are lighted by great chandeliers of salt crystals. There is one in the Michaelowice chamber, 10 feet in diameter, 20 feet high and containing about 240 candles.

The Kaiser Franz chamber, named after the present ruler of the dual monarchy, contains two immense pyramids with ornamental bases, commemorating a visit of the Emperor and Empress many years ago. This hall is nearly 200 feet long and about 105 feet high. Leaving this chamber, one crosses a wooden bridge over a subterranean river filled with blind fish, and in the dim light of torches one beholds another public monument—an obelisk 30 feet high, carved in the rock salt, and recording a visit of the late Crown Prince Rudolph and Princess Stephanie in 1887.

One may mention in passing the Drozdowice and Archduke Frederick chambers, on the way to the Central Railroad station, which is named after Count Goluchowski. Here meet all the little trolley lines of the underground city, and it was made a kind of central "Broadway" three centuries ago. Here converge many of the principal street or galleries of the East Field. The lines are narrow gauge, and the little cars are drawn by Polish ponies, most of whom have never been on earth at all, and are born blind.

The platform of this "Grand Central depot" has seating accommodations for 400 persons, and on holidays in cafes and restaurants are crowded with visitors from the upper world, who eat and drink and enjoy the wild music of the miners' orchestra, which echoes and reverberates strangely though the dim yet sparkling streets.

Nor must we forget to mention the salt lakes of the city, in many places 20 or 30 feet deep, and navigated by ferry boats containing twenty-five persons. These lakes give access to remote and very ancient parts of the city, such, for example, as the Stephanie diaeval saints rise strangely out of the dense salt water, grit and enshrined, as it were, by most beautiful salt stalactites and stalagmites. But while admiring these wonders, this patient work of ages, let us not lose sight of the hard life which the poor mining inhabitants of the Salt City are compelled to live. There are some two thousand men at work day and night down here, in eight-hour shifts, and as a rule the men get little more than twenty cents a day. Like the monks of the great St. Bernard, their allotted span of life is short. The men have a peculiar livid look. They are hollow-cheeked and bloodless—a condition probably due to the action of the salt on the system after years of insidious contact.

Besides floods, falls of salt masses and fires—all of which catastrophes take on additional horror down in the depths—another serious danger is the violent explosions of carbureted hydrogen, which may accumulate in newly-excavated galleries. All holidays, political and religious, are celebrated in the City of Salt with a careless clan that blots out all thought of sorrow. There are imposing services in the unique cathedral, dances, picnics, boating parties, and even marriages down in this strange underworld, hollowed out of the rock salt.

Children are born here, too, and christened. When these grow up, of course, they take naturally to the work of their fathers, and help to hew out the hundreds of thousands of tons of rock salt which is a governmental monopoly. The men seem perfectly happy, and to see them on a festive day, when the streets are half an inch deep in ruby and diamond-flashing salt pebbles and dust; when the Emperor may be on his throne in the great Lentow saloon, and 250 slave musicians directing a perfect orgie of delight—then indeed one would say the citizens of the salt domain need no sympathy from outsiders.

A Parrot Story from Nation's Capital

New York World.

When the President and his family went to Oyster Bay, a pet parrot of which Mr. Roosevelt is fond was turned over to a dealer to be cared for. The parrot was introduced into the Roosevelt household some years ago, and became much attached to the President's eldest daughter. Its voice shouting, "Alice! Alice! Alice!" was frequently heard ringing through the hall ways.

With the marriage of Miss Roosevelt to Representative Longworth the parrot seemed to lose interest in life. Its jubilant voice changed to a dull croak, and the familiar cry of "Alice!" changed to a colorless echo. It no longer flapped its wings, nor did its shrill cries ring through the house.

Then came the departure of Mrs. Longworth for Europe. The parrot's proud plumage fell. For days it sat upon its perch as though in a stupor. Now it is surrounded by birds of every description and elude; but it does not notice them. It sits with its head tucked under its wings, and no amount of persuasion can induce it to talk.

New York World.

The following is a copy of a letter sent to Secretary Taft by President Roosevelt regarding the slaughter of Boros at Mount Dajo, written according to the new spelling:

The Whit House, Washington, August 14, 1906.

My. Der Mr. Secretary—I hav resevd yer letter of March, 13, with akompanying kabl of Gen. Wood ansering yer inquiry as to the alejd waton slawter of Moros.

This anser is, of kors, entirely satisfactory. The ofisers and enlistd men under Gen. Wood's komand hav performed a most galant and soldierly feet in a wa konfers aded kredt on the Amerikan Army.

Tha r entild to the hartiest admirashun and pras of thos of ther felotizens who r glad to e the honor of the flag upheld by the konraj of the men waring the Amerikan uniform.

Theodor Ruzvelt.

Natural Question.

Exchange.

A little Philadelphia boy was taken by his father for his first visit to the zoo. Stopping before an inclosure, he asked, "Papa, what animal is that?" Reading the sign tacked up to one side his father responded, "That, my son, is a prong horned antelope." "Kin he blow his horn?" was the question that promptly followed.

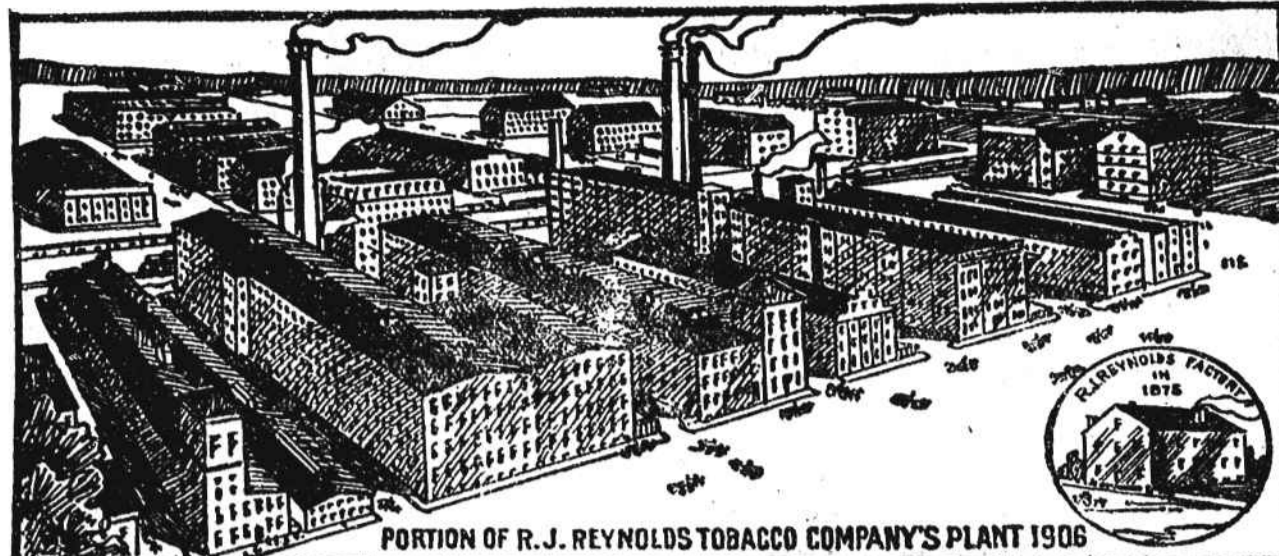
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MULE LOST—Black horse mule lost on Saturday night about 1 o'clock between Gary's Lane and Bush river church. Had riding bridle on, no harness. Please notify T. J. Oxner, at Kinards, or return mule to that place.

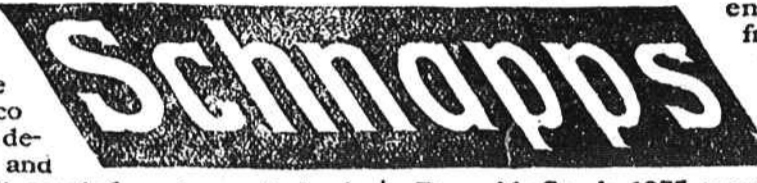


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Reynolds Co., in 1875, are directing it to-day. There are a greater number of manufacturers making imitations claimed to be just as good as SCHNAPPS than any commodity manufactured; yet there are more pounds of SCHNAPPS chewed than the total amount of all imitative brands, or tobacco of similar appearance.

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