

# Souvenir China

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Western mining towns are well known for their rough and tumble atmosphere. Mention a booming gold strike town like Victor, Colorado, circa 1898, and it brings to mind false front saloons with whiskey-soaked saw dust floors, rough sawn wooden assay offices and narrow alleys between the "line" where the nightlife mined the miner's pockets.

The words "Fine China, Made In Germany," are way down on the list of things associated with late 19th and early 20th century mining districts. Yet souvenir items made from fine china were nearly as plentiful as bawdy houses. Sold from drug stores, department stores and grocery stores, the very fragile fine china souvenir pieces specific to the mining towns can still be found in surprising numbers and variations. They were articles meant to advertise the specific store, as well as entice the folks back home in the eastern states of what they were missing out west.

Often wildly colorful and intricately detailed, many of these china pieces portray specific large mines, such as the Independence Mine in Victor, Colorado, and mining smelters such as the hugely famous Anaconda Smelter in Anaconda, Montana. It is my feeling that the china souvenir pieces representing large mines may have been ordered as much to sell mining stock as to impress the tourists.

Pressed out in the shape of everything from candy trays to fancy vases, much of this china was made by Wheelock & Company in Germany. Other china companies that may be found include Janroth, Germany and D.E. McNicole, of East Liverpool, England. Wheelock China, however, appears to have been the most prolific manufacturer.

Not to be outdone, eastern coal mining towns, as well as mining towns in the Tri-State Lead and Zinc Mining District of southwestern Missouri,

southeastern Kansas and northeastern Oklahoma and the Upper Peninsula Michigan copper mines, produced many fine pieces advertising souvenir china. The western hard rock mining districts, however, were shorter lived, and the souvenir china from these areas is a bit tougher to find. As mineral-bearing ore was found in a general location, a town would spring up, be named in favor of some local landmark or founding figure, stores and saloons built, and souvenir china ordered to commemorate the town and mines. Many times in the west, these towns disappeared almost as quickly as the china would arrive at a store, as the pay rock was found to not extend beyond the grass roots. Mining town china from shortlived towns such as Sneffles, Colorado and Seven Troughs, Nevada, are most sought after and rarely come to light.

Mining town souvenir pieces can be found in custard glass, milk glass and ruby-flashed glass, as well as fine porcelain china. The images were applied in much the same manner as a silk-screened image on a piece of clothing, and the photographs contain a surprising amount of detail.

The source for much of the souvenir mining china found today is antique bottle shows, general antique shows and, of course, the ubiquitous eBay. Several fine pieces, however, have been found in the dumps and outhouses of long abandoned towns. One piece was unearthed by the author at a mine near Silverton, though I was never able to establish why a hard rock miner may have wanted such a fragile item in his meager bedroll.

The colors and designs of mining town china make fine additions to any shelf or cabinet holding a collection of beautiful antique bottles. The history that goes with them make it that much more enjoyable to collect. Good hunting!



**Gold Dredging Feather River. Oroville, Calif. Souvenir plate. Depicts a scene on the Famous Feather River in California's Mother Lode Country. These huge dredge boats would float in a pond of their own making, bringing up thousands of tons of river gravels per day, separating the gold from the gravels, and spilling the gravels back into the river or along the river banks.**



**Steam Shovel at work Chapin Mine Iron Mountain Mich. Beautiful custard glass container.**





Independence Mine, Cripple Creek, Colorado. Fancy candy dish. Beautiful dish showing the mine and mine buildings of one of the most famous mines in the Cripple Creek Mining District. The Independence Mine brought forth millions of dollars of gold for its owner, Winfield Scott Stratton, and was located near the town of Victor.



Smelter At Anaconda. Souvenir plate. This scene depicts the large smelter at Anaconda, Montana. Circa 1890's



Pueblo Smelting & Refining Co., Pueblo, Colo. Fancy candy dish. Depicts a scene of this smelter working to reduce ore likely brought down from the nearby Cripple Creek, Colorado, Mining District. Circa 1890's.



Souvenir miner's shaving mug, inscribed with "A Lancashire Miner's Prayer..."



Reverse of the miners' shaving mug



The Prospector In Cripple Creek. Cup and saucer. Depicting a fully outfitted miner and his stalwart and trustworthy burro.



The Silver Smuggler & Molly Gibson Mines. Large serving china pitcher. Mine buildings and mine track of this large Aspen, Colorado, Mine.



Picturesque Park City. Fancy souvenir plate. Depicts several scenes, including mines, in Park City Utah.



From left to right, pictured are the Silver Bell Mill and Mine, the Daly West Mine, the Anchor Mine, St. Mary's Church and School, and the Lincoln School.