

Pachuca's Mining Museum

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Pachuca's Mining Museum¹ is an homage to the workers who have sculpted the entrails of the earth for almost five centuries, members of one of the world's most valiant, zestful and noble trades: the miners of Real del Monte and Pachuca. It is a door to the history of the activity that gave rise to the cultural and economic development of this part of Hidalgo state.

That history begins long before the Spaniards arrived, when the residents of Teotihuacan had the monopoly of the obsidian mines around Pachuca; arrowheads, idols and even mirrors that still reflect the majesty of the pre-Hispanic world came from those mines.

The arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century opened up new vistas. The San Buenaventura, San Miguel and San Antonio Regla ore-refining haciendas are extant witnesses to that time; their construction cost the lives of many indigenous workers and slaves, whose price on the auction block depended on their physique (for the men) and whether they were pregnant or not (for the women). The beginnings of class consciousness among the miners and their wives date from that period, when they initiated their uninterrupted struggle for their

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Unless otherwise specified, photos by Marco Antonio Hernández Badillo

rights, a struggle that culminated only centuries later with the founding of the National Miners Union in 1934.

In the nineteenth century, the mining culture diversified and flourished noticeably. A group of English businessmen,

In the twentieth century, in contrast to the general exhaustion of the ore, the cultural veins continued to grow, now with the contribution of U.S. technology and labor. Something seemingly irrelevant to the daily life of the town,

cyanide, or their tops, instead of the traditional shingles. Gabled roofs made of these materials are one of the town's most obvious characteristics.

Also, the presence of foreign engineers motivated Mexicans to train and seek places for themselves in mining; the workers also became aware of a need to study. By the end of the twentieth century, then, Pachuca and Real del Monte boasted workers who had become writers, poets, safety supervisors and empirical or practical engineers.



As soon as you walk in the door, you are surrounded by history.

THE "CASHIERS WINDOWS" OF SAN RAFAEL

The Mining Museum is located in what were the old "cashiers windows," or offices, of the San Rafael Mining company, in the middle of the city's downtown area. In the past, the building had



Miners with their equipment in 1927.

The exhibitions aim to bring visitors closer to mining history and give them an idea of the process of mining ores like silver and gold.

engineers and workers voyaged to the legendary mines of Real del Monte and Pachuca. Their presence and that of an enterprising group of Mexican entrepreneurs after mid-century would leave an indelible mark on the culture and appearance of these mining towns.

like the substitution of the cyanide process for the old amalgamation process of refining the ore, actually had a profound, visible impact on it. For example, the inhabitants of Real del Monte began to build their roofs with the corrugated metal tanks used for the

a dual function: on the ground floor were the general offices, several special rooms for keeping coins and silver ingots; two rooms for files and another for the horses' barley. The second floor was a beautiful mansion, the living quarters of the company's director and

the general manager and their families, as well as guest rooms for distinguished guests.²

In 1944, the building was used as a primary and junior high school, as well as a teachers college, and since 1987 it has held the offices of the Mining Historical Archive and Museum non-governmental organization.

THE GALLERIES

The museum has three areas for permanent exhibitions, two for temporary exhibits, a multi-purpose hall and an Industrial Archeology Space. The exhibitions aim to bring visitors closer to

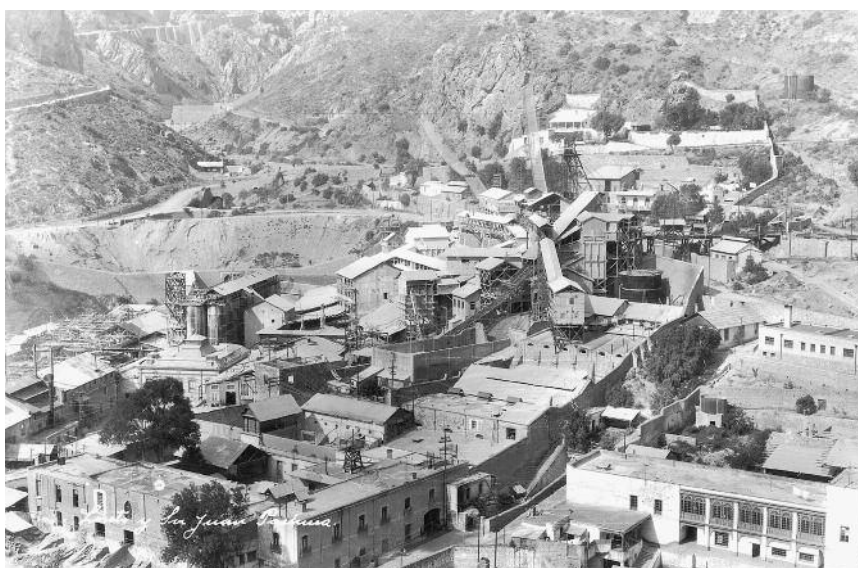
A visit to the
Pachuca Mining Museum
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Mother Earth.

mining history and give them an idea of the process of mining ores like silver and gold.

The main gallery is divided into five sections: geological exploration, extracting and processing the ores, the miners' union and industrial safety. The first three deal with the technical processes involved in silver mining and the other two look at the social and labor aspects, like worker organization and owners' and employees' efforts to reduce the number of accidents in the mines.



A shredder and office equipment.



The Loreto Refining Hacienda and San Juan Pachuca Mine in Pachuca, Hidalgo, ca. 1929.

This room also offers the visitor a collection of samples from different mining centers in Mexico, maps of nineteenth century mines, contemporary and nineteenth-century photographs of the interiors and exteriors of mines, miners working, mine hoists, mining and refining haciendas, civic buildings and workers' daily life.

There is also an exhibit of a collection of drills made in the Maestranza Foundry workshops, patented by the Real del Monte and Pachuca Company

(CRMyP) when it belonged to U.S. owners, as well as other mining tools and implements.

THE INDUSTRIAL ARCHEOLOGY SPACE

The Industrial Archeology Space in the main patio and gardens exhibits heavy machinery: a late-nineteenth century steam drill and Mack trucks, dubbed "parrots" because they are painted green, that transported the ore from



The permanent exhibition hall.



Diamond-tipped steam drill.

the Loreto refining hacienda to the train station. One of the most impressive pieces is an 80-ton crane manufactured by Cleveland's Brown Hoisting Machinery Co. The crane was first steam-driven and then adapted to run on diesel and used in the Maestranza workshops until they closed in 1987. Other heavy equipment on display are the mine cars (also known as "shells" or "gondolas"); a pneumatic shovel that the miners called "the ant"; soldering plants with their own coal deposits; diamond-



Nineteenth century steam crane.

tipped drills; bedding pots, melting pots, a radial drill and a skip.

The museum recently acquired a functioning Hickok Harrisburg shredder that saw over a century of service in the CRMYP print shop.

ADDITIONAL SERVICES

The two temporary exhibit rooms are used to foster and disseminate the visual arts. The work of Francisco Toledo, Se-

bastián Salgado, Francisco de Goya, Alfredo Zalce, Gilberto Aceves Navarro, Oscar Bachtold, Nicolás Moreno, Pablo Ortiz Monasterio and Pedro Ascencio, among others, has been shown there.

The multi-purpose room is used to show a video about the history of mining in the area, as part of the guided tours offered in both English and Spanish. It has also hosted lecture series about both the history of mining and the visual arts.

The museum is part of an institution that was born to restore and preserve the archives of the CRMYP, broadening them out to include documents dating from 1556 to 1968 and information about other mines, photograph and map collections and a library.

It has become a medium for encouraging research into these old mines and the families and lives of the residents of Pachuca and Real del Monte.

A visit to the Pachuca Mining Museum is a visit to the bowels of the earth; a visit that helps us understand the work needed to get at the riches of Mother Earth, who, loving but demanding, covers the miners with her cloak at the same time that she demands payment for everything torn from her.³ **VM**

NOTES

¹ The museum is part of the AHMM, a nongovernmental organization sustained by Xavier Autrey y Maza and Alonso and Jorge Ancira, and by donations from the Steel Group of the North.

² José Eduardo Bejos Paredes, "Restauración de las Antiguas Cajas de San Rafael, Pachuca, Hgo." (Instituto Tecnológico de Pachuca: undergraduate thesis, 1993).

³ For more information about the institution's services or to make donations, please contact: Calle Mina No. 110, Centro Pachuca, Hidalgo, México, C.P. 42000; or telephone or send a fax to (52) (7) 715-0976. E-mail: ahmm@prodigy.net.mx