

# Then and Now—A Brief History of Tokay, New Mexico

Stephen C. Hook, Atarque Geologic Consulting, LLC, Socorro, NM 87801

## Then

In the 1920s the coal-mining settlement of Tokay, Socorro County, New Mexico (Fig. 1), was a bustling town of a few hundred inhabitants, including 125 coal miners (Julyan, 1996, p. 356). Tokay was on the southwest side of the Carthage coal field, about 10 miles east of San Antonio, New Mexico. See map in Hook and Cobban 2015 (this volume, p. 27). Among more than 50 frame structures Tokay boasted a single two-story building that had a pool hall/barbershop/bar on the first floor and a school for grades 1-5 on the second. A staircase on the outside of the building allowed the students to go to school without having to pass through the bar first.

A power plant on the north end of town provided electricity for Tokay; it billows smoke both in the postcard (Fig. 1) and in the 1927 oil painting of the town (cover and Fig. 2B). A combination general store/post office/mine office on the north side of the camp provided supplies for the miners and their families. The settlement had no bank, so the miners were paid partly in script or trade tokens in various denominations that could be redeemed at the store. The general store stocked the case of Tokay grapes that gave the town its name in 1917 (Anonymous, 1968).

The original town was established in 1915 by Bartley H. Kinney, who later served as President of the board of Regents of the New Mexico School of Mines. Mr. Kinney, a mining engineer, organized the San Antonio Coal Company to mine coal in the southwest portion of the Carthage coal field. During the first year or two of its existence, the town had no formal, i.e., no federally recognized, name. The Post Office Department had rejected many names for the town, including the name “Kinney,” which it found to be in conflict. One day, according to Julyan (1996, p. 356), “... while Kinney and a postal inspector were discussing names in the community’s general store, Kinney looked at a case of Tokay grapes on the counter and asked, “How about Tokay?” The inspector agreed and the town of Tokay was born, named for a very sweet grape and wine that had nothing to do with coal mining. Tokay had a post office from 1917 until 1932. Mining ceased in the late 1940s, when most of the town’s frame buildings were moved to Socorro.

However, during Tokay’s heyday, the plaza between the school house and general store (Figs. 1 and 3) was used for festivals and celebrations; three major holidays—Mexico’s 1862 victory over France (Cinco de Mayo), U.S. Independence Day (July 4th), and Mexican Independence Day (Sixteenth of September)—were celebrated with explosions of miners’ firecrackers (sticks of dynamite). The married miners and their families lived in four rows of six frame houses on either side of the plaza (Fig. 3). A physician lived and worked in town. A small Catholic mission, part of the San Marcial Parish, was located on the south end of the settlement, as was a windmill that was the water source for the camp’s boilers and industrial use. A well about a mile south of the camp provided drinking water. Details of the town of Tokay (Fig. 3) are from Trancito Diaz, (1915–1990), a long time resident of Tokay, who moved there from Jalisco, Mexico in 1920.

Bartley H. Kinney (1884–1959), former superintendent of the Carthage Fuel Company, founded what would become Tokay in 1915 when he homesteaded 160 acres on the southwest side of the Carthage coal field in the SW1/4 NE1/4 and the W1/2 SE1/4 section 8 and the NW1/4 NE1/4 section 17, T. 5 S., R. 2 E. of the New Mexico Meridian, Socorro County, New Mexico. At an elevation of 5,055 ft, Tokay sat on a mesa underlain by the resistant Pleistocene Sierra Ladrones Formation. The productive Kinney No. 1 and No. 4 mines were located about half a mile southeast of the settlement. The main coal seam, which is up to

5 ft thick, lies in the basal part of the Dilco Coal Member of the Crevasse Canyon Formation, 25 ft or so above its contact with the Gallup Sandstone (Hook 2010, fig. 6).

Coal mining was backbreaking, dangerous work. Miners were generally paid by the number of coal cars they filled; usually six to seven cars per shift. In her scrapbook of memorabilia on life in Tokay and the Carthage coal field, Ruth Kinney Gannaway (written communication, May 5, 2015) who was born in Tokay, recounts the system used to keep track of which miners had worked on any given day. Before going into the mines, each miner took a “washer,” also known as “miner’s brass,” from a pegboard in the office with his unique number on it. At the end of the shift, he returned the washer to the pegboard. In this way Mr. Kinney could make sure no one was left in the mine at the end of the day.

Coal production from Tokay increased steadily from 1915 to 1927 as Mr. Kinney opened more mines. However, the Depression and the introduction of lower cost fuel oil and natural gas for heating and power generation took its toll in the late 1920s (Hoffman and Hereford, 2009, p. 412). Tokay lost its major contract with El Paso Gas and Electric Company about 1928 to the El Paso Natural Gas Company; this loss reduced Tokay from a railroad-serviced town to a truck-serviced town (Anonymous, 1968). Commercial mining ceased in the late 1940s. In 1949 Mr. Kinney sold the land and his house to Mr. and Mrs. Dean Fite. Mr. Kinney’s original house is still in use today as the Fite Ranch Headquarters (Fig. 3). The name Tokay lives on as a legacy of New Mexico’s coal mining history and as the formal stratigraphic name of a tongue of the Upper Cretaceous Mancos Shale (this volume, p. 27–46).

## Now

In 2014 what remains of Tokay is on the north end of a wind-swept mesa, about 10 miles east of San Antonio, New Mexico, and a mile south of US Highway 380. Its 50 or so buildings have been reduced to the Fite Ranch Headquarters (Mr. Kinney’s former house) along with an adjacent garage and guest quarters; the single workers’ quarters (not visible in Figure 2), a long narrow building about a tenth of a mile to the northwest of, but at a lower elevation than, the ranch house is the main portion of the Fite Ranch Bed and Breakfast. The present population of Tokay is two: Dewey and Linda Brown who bought the Fite Ranch from Evelyn Fite in 2002.

## The Painter

The painting of Tokay (cover and Fig. 2B) was painted onsite by Audley Dean Nicols (1875–1941) in 1927. Little biographical information is available either online or in print about Mr. Nicols; even less is known about how he happened to be in Tokay, New Mexico, in 1927. Audley Dean Nicols was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1885 and died in El Paso, Texas, in 1941. He was primarily a landscape painter, but also did illustrations for *Cosmopolitan*, *McClure’s*, *Collier’s*, and other well known magazines of the day. He had tuberculosis of the hip (osteoarticular tuberculosis) and moved to El Paso for health reasons by 1927. He spent the remainder of his life painting landscapes in the deserts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.

The story surrounding this painting according to Mrs. Gannaway, (personal communication, 2013), is that “...Audley Dean Nicols of El Paso, Texas, was in need of coal to heat his home, but did not have the money to pay for it. He went to Mr. Kinney and said that he would do an oil painting of Tokay in

exchange for the coal he needed. Mr. Kinney said fine and got a beautiful painting plus a record that there was a town there in the 1920s.”[sic]

Coal from the Kinney mines was delivered by train and sold in El Paso, Texas, in the 1920s (Hoffman and Hereford, 2009, p. 412). Some of the coal shipped to El Paso could have been used in smelting lead and copper by the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO), which started operations in El Paso in 1887 (Orden, 2013); some could have been sold for residential heating. The unknown factor in the story of the painting is why Mr. Nichols, already a successful artist in 1927, was in Tokay if he lived in El Paso, 200 miles to the south. Perhaps Mr. Nicols went to Tokay to cut out the middleman and barter personally with Mr. Kinney for the coal; his coal could have been sent to El Paso by rail as part of a regular shipment. Whatever the situation, Audley Dean Nichols left an invaluable record of an important and colorful part of New Mexico’s coal mining past.

After reading a draft of this paper, Mrs. Gannaway (written communication, August 2013) had this to say by way of speculation about the origin of the painting: “As for Mr. Nicols’ story about the picture [and] the load of coal—it’s the only story I ever heard—but I do know that stories tend to get changed in the telling. I know that my father went to El Paso fairly often. In 1927 he had moved his family to Albuquerque. He may have had a thought that he would like to have a painting of his town before it disappeared and he may have heard of Nicols’ talent and the coal was in El Paso—it could be they did a little bartering.”

## The Painting

The painting (cover and Fig. 2B) is an oil on canvas that is 30 inches long by 17 inches high. Based on the geology (with the Eocene Baca Formation in the foreground) and perspective, Mr. Nicols painted his picture looking west from an elevation of 5,155 feet in the NE 1/4 NW 1/4 SE 1/4 SE1/4 section 16, T. 5 S., R. 2 E., Cerro de Campana 7.5 quadrangle, Socorro County, New Mexico, approximately 0.2 mi N 14°E of the feature labeled “radio towers” on the Cerro de la Campana 7.5’ quadrangle. The panoramic photograph (Fig. 2A,C) was taken on January 8, 2011 with the tripod positioned approximately on the spot where Mr. Nicols stood when he painted the town (UTM point 339637 mE and 3748942 mN, Zone 13S, NAD27). The Fite Ranch headquarters is 0.9 mi away; the Magdalena Mountains are 28 mi to the west, and “M” Mountain is 19 mi to the northwest.

When viewed by itself, the painting appears to be undistorted with horizontal and vertical scales approximately equal; the buildings and landscape appear to have a natural look to them. However, when the painting is compared to the photographic panorama with the same horizontal scale as the painting (Fig. 2C), it becomes apparent that the vertical scale of the painting is approximately two times that of the horizontal scale (Fig. 2A). This exaggeration factor of 2.0 not only makes the mountains more impressive, but also allows enough vertical space in the painting that Tokay’s buildings can be differentiated from each other. This exaggeration also shows the “M” on Socorro Peak to good effect. According to Eveleth (2010, 2011, and this volume, p. 50), the New Mexico School of Mines class of 1914 surveyed and built the “M” on Socorro Peak. The “M” presumably stands for “Mines, minerals, and midnight oil.” To become proficient at the first two Ms, the students at the School of Mines had to burn a lot of the latter. [A volcanologist at the New Mexico Bureau of Geology offers a dissenting, tongue-in-cheek, view: he says the “M” stands for Miocene, the age of rocks it is painted on.] The “M” is roughly 150 feet high and 110 feet wide, freshened every year by a whitewash composed of lime (now powdered limestone or marble) and water.

Exactly when Mr. Nicols completed his painting and how long it took him to paint it are unknown. There are no clues present in the painting to suggest the season in which it was painted. In both

painting and panorama the vegetation in the foreground is green and the mountains in the background are without any snow cover. The panorama was photographed in January 2011.

The original painting hangs in the home of Mr. Edward Kinney Jr., Cupertino, California. Photographic reproductions of the painting belong to Mrs. Ruth Kinney Gannaway, Albuquerque, New Mexico, Mrs. Evelyn Fite, Socorro, New Mexico, and Mr. and Mrs. Dewey Brown, “Tokay,” New Mexico.

## Summary

The importance of the isolated exposure of Upper Cretaceous rocks, known as the Carthage coal field, in central New Mexico was summarized by Howard Nicholson (1990): “The Carthage coal field played an important part in New Mexico history. It kept soldiers at Fort Craig warm, shoes on their mules and horses, and wagon rims tight; it made coke to smelt the rich silver ores and fueled the Santa Fe engines; it heated countless homes from Socorro into Old Mexico; and it left two ghost towns [Carthage and Tokay].”

## Acknowledgments

I thank Mrs. Ruth Kinney Gannaway and Mr. Edward Kinney Jr. for permission to publish a photographic reproduction of the painting of Tokay, New Mexico, and the schematic map of Tokay. Ruth Gannaway, Evelyn Fite, and Dewey and Linda Brown provided stimulating discussions on Tokay and the painting. Dewey Brown took the author to the spot where Audley Nichols stood as he painted the town of Tokay. Mr. Donald Boyd, Socorro, took the panoramic photograph shown in Figure 2. Ruth Kinney Gannaway and Robert Eveleth read an early version of this paper and provided helpful suggestions.

## References

- Anonymous, 1968, Old NM mining town of Tokay got name from case of grapes: reprinted in the El Paso Times, May 5, 1968 and credited as “special” to the Sundial, Socorro, New Mexico, 2 pp.
- Eveleth, R. W., 2010, The story of the “M” on Socorro’s peak in “Relatos del Pasada – Stories of the Past”: El Defensor Chieftain, Socorro, New Mexico, July 7, 2010, pp. B2–B5.
- Eveleth, R. W., 2011, Mines, minerals and midnight oil: El Defensor Chieftain, Socorro, New Mexico, August 17, 2011, p.12.
- Hoffman, G. K. and Hereford, J. P., 2009, Mining history of the Carthage coal field, Socorro County, New Mexico; in Lueth, V. W., Lucas, S. G., and Chamberlin, R. M. (eds.), Geology of the Chupadera Mesa: New Mexico Geological Society, Guidebook 60, pp. 407–413.
- Hook, S. C., 2010, *Flemingostrea elegans*, n. sp.: guide fossil to marine, lower Coniacian (Upper Cretaceous) strata of central New Mexico: New Mexico Geology, v. 32, no. 2, pp. 35–57.
- Nicholson, H., 1990, The history of the Carthage coal field: Fort Craig Conference, February 23, 1990, 4 pp.
- Julyan, R., 1996, The place names of New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 385 pp.
- Orden, E., 2013, El Paso says goodbye to landmark: The Wall Street Journal, April 15, 2013, p. A6.
- Wilpolt, R. H., and Wanek, G., 1946, Geology of the region from Socorro and San Antonio east to Chupadera Mesa, Socorro County, New Mexico: U.S. Geological Survey, Oil and Gas Investigations Map 121.

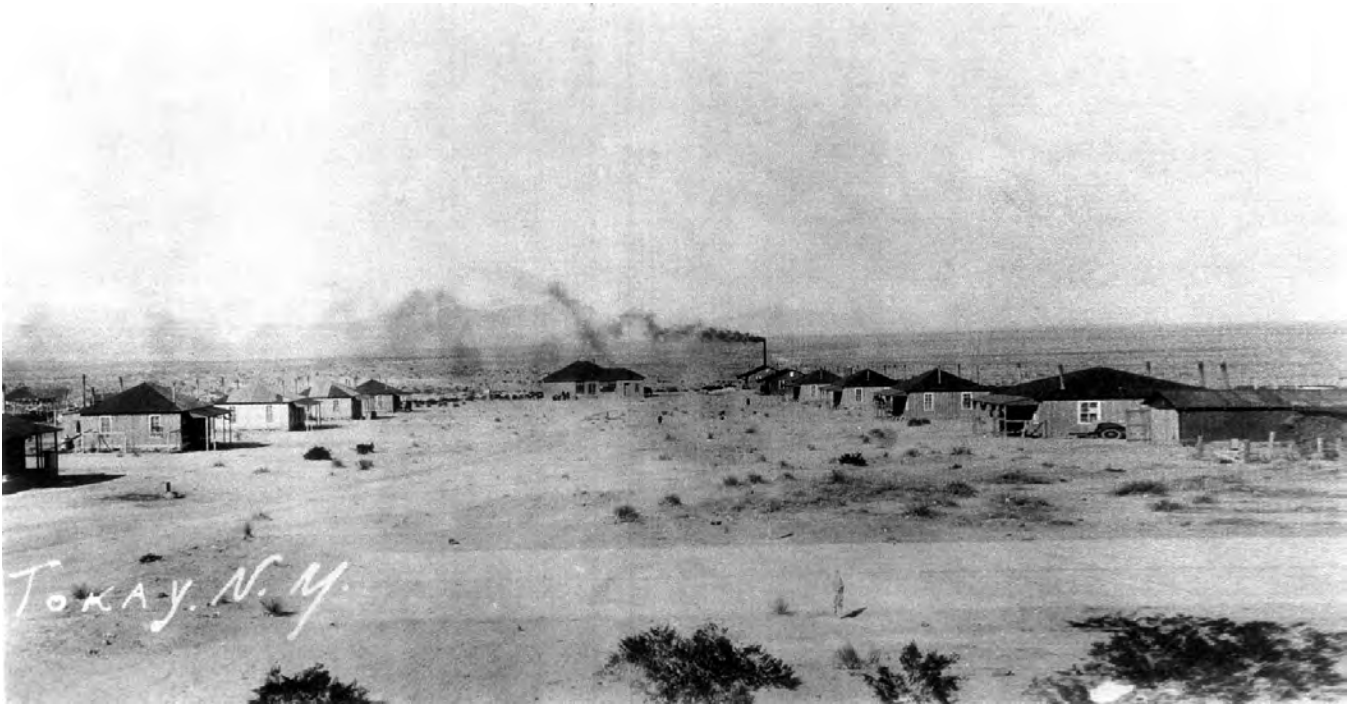
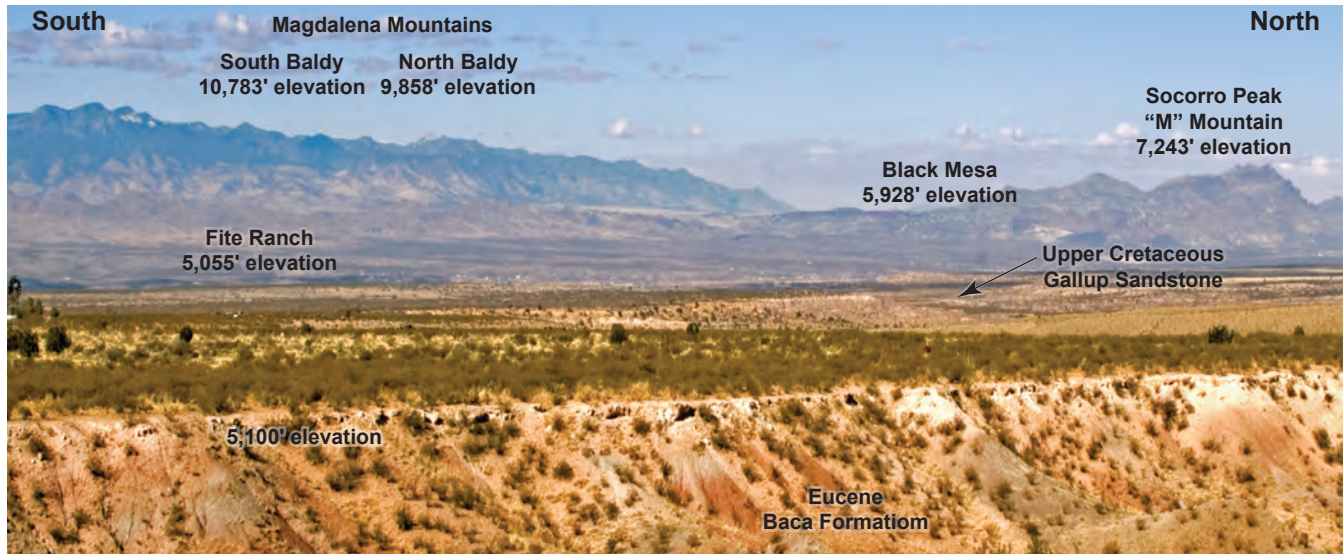
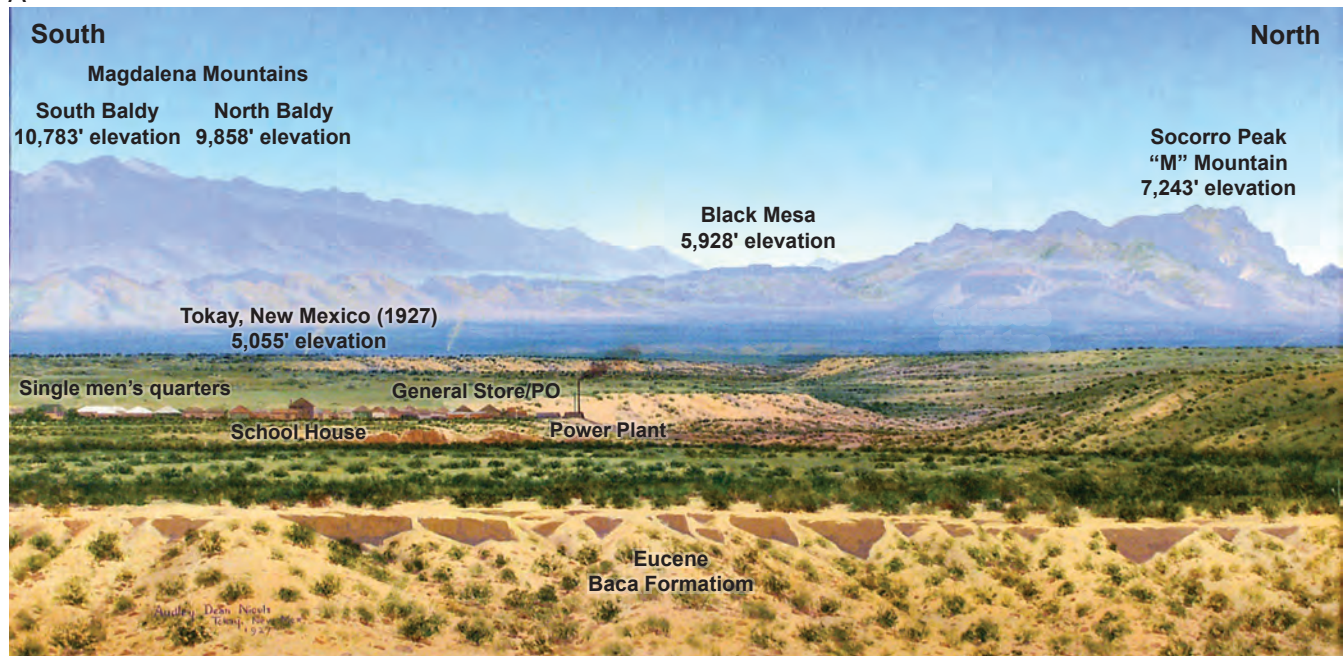


Figure 1—1920s postcard of Tokay, Socorro County, New Mexico. This view is taken from the south end of the town plaza looking north across the windswept mesa on the southwest side of the Carthage coal field. The large building in the center distance is the Kinney store/post office; to its right (east), the power plant billows smoke to the west. The frame houses in the foreground were the homes of the coal miners and their families that were dismantled and moved to Socorro, New Mexico, when Tokay was abandoned in the 1940s.

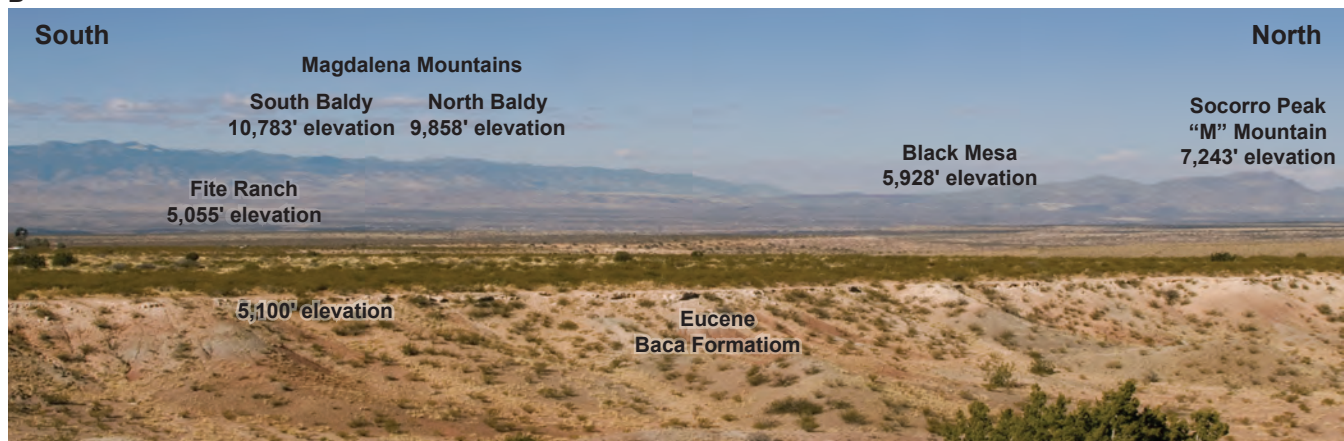




A



B



C

Figure 2—One of the crown jewels of illustrations of ghost towns in New Mexico is this oil painting of Tokay dated 1927 and signed by the well-known western artist Audley Dean Nicols (1875–1941). Mr. Nichols reportedly traded this painting for a load of coal (see text for details). In this figure, the painting (B) can be compared visually with two versions (A and C) of a panoramic digital image taken from the same spot from which Mr. Nicols made the painting. Both digital images have the same horizontal scale as the painting. In (A) the vertical scale is twice the horizontal scale (exaggeration factor = 2.0); in (C) the vertical scale is the same as the horizontal scale (exaggeration factor = 1.0). A visual comparison of the topographic profiles of the mountains in the background of the panoramic photographs (A and C) with the painting (B) shows that the painting has a vertical scale of approximately twice that of the horizontal scale.



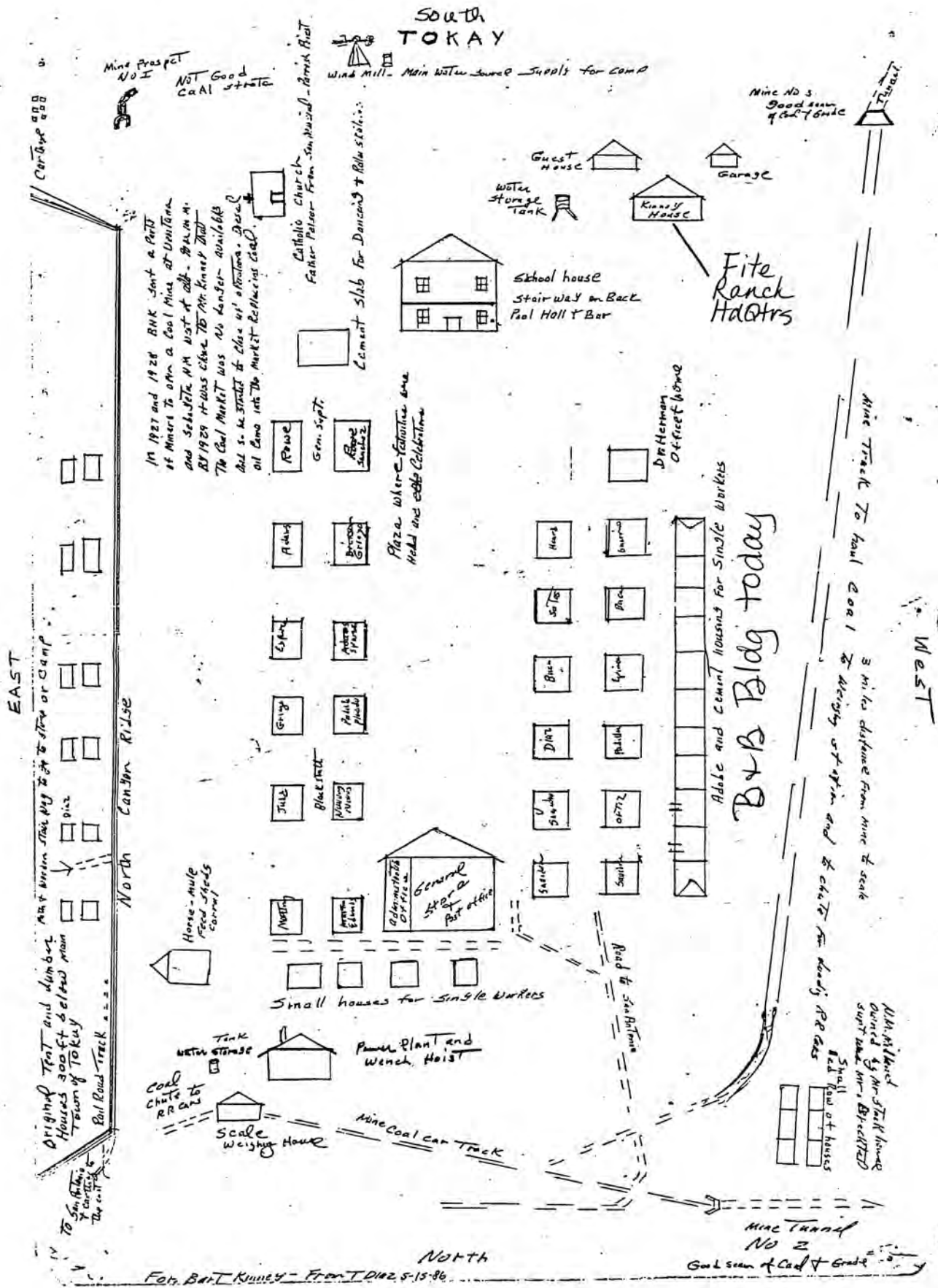


Figure 3. Schematic diagram, not to scale, of the plat of Tokay showing the layout of the settlement with the names of the last occupants of each house. Modified from a memorandum from Trancito Diaz to B. T. Kinney dated May 15, 1986.