

Name _____ Date _____

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Virginia City

- 1 Virginia City, Nevada, was the first silver boomtown. In 1858, it did not exist. In fact, Nevada was not yet a state then—or even an official territory. The whole area was part of Utah Territory.
- 2 The story of Virginia City began on June 28, 1859. That day, two prospectors discovered ore by the Washoe Mountains in western Nevada. A third miner, Henry Comstock, happened by soon after and joined the claim. He boasted about it so loudly that the rich deposit took his name, the Comstock Lode. Virginia City sprang up overnight as almost 10,000 miners rushed to the area.
- 3 Many prospectors soon suffered disappointment. In California, they had been able to mine for gold with few tools, but the Washoe strike was different. The silver was locked deep inside underground rock. To get it out would require costly machines.
- 4 By August 1860, Virginia City’s population had decreased to 2,345. However, many houses, stores, restaurants, and other businesses were still in service.
- 5 Soon, big operators took the lead in the extraction of the underground silver. New equipment and new methods allowed them to reach the silver and remove it from the rock. Virginia City’s population rose to 15,000 by 1863. The silver bonanza led to the founding of Nevada Territory in 1861 and to Nevada statehood in 1864.

continued 

- 6 Famous author Samuel Clemens lived in the boomtown in the 1860s. He first used his *nom de plume*, Mark Twain, as a writer at Virginia City's newspaper.
- 7 About half of the United States' silver came from Virginia City mines during its silver boom. By 1875, 20,000 people had settled there, and it was one of the country's largest cities. Miners arrived from every part of the country and from every continent to work in the big mines.
- 8 Silver production at Washoe lasted more than twenty years, but the deposits did not last forever. By the 1880s, miners were saying good-bye to Virginia City. By 1889, the population had dropped to 9,000. Today, fewer than 1,000 people live in the old silver boomtown.