Horace Austin Warner Tabor Biography

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Biography

Horace Austin Warner Tabor (1830-1899), an American mining magnate and politician, was a great benefactor of Colorado.

Horace Tabor was born in Orleans County, Vt., on Nov. 26, 1830. He left home while still in his teens and became a stonecutter. In 1855 he migrated to Kansas. While farming there, he also served in the Free State legislature; neither endeavor proved rewarding, so he joined the Pike's Peak gold rush in 1859.

For the next 18 years Tabor's activities shifted from camp to camp, where he gained mining experience and operated a store. The merchant-miner combination produced a steady income, but his chance for wealth came with the opening of the Leadville, Colo., silver mines. A fortunate grubstake by Tabor to two prospectors in 1878 led to the discovery of the Little Pittsburg Mine and his first million dollars; then successful investments parlayed his worth to $5-7 million.

Tabor invested in mines in almost all the western states and Mexico. Once he was financially secure, he turned to politics. He served two terms as Republican lieutenant governor of Colorado (1879-1883) and hoped to become a senator, but after an expensive and bitter campaign in 1882-1883 he was chosen by the legislature only to fill an unexpired 30-day term. Later attempts for the party's gubernatorial nomination failed, but he liberally supported the Republicans despite the rebuffs.

Tabor moved to Denver in 1879 and significantly contributed to the city's growth. The first of the Colorado mining millionaires to invest his fortune at home, he built the Tabor Block and the famous Tabor Grand Opera House. He displayed his confidence in the future of the state by investing in Leadville and other towns and helping to open the San Juan, Gunnison, and Aspen areas.

This faith in western growth led Tabor into marginal investments which failed. By the late 1880s decreasing mine production and a falling silver price forced him to mortgage sound holdings to continue development. When the economic crash of 1893 came, his business-mining empire was debt-ridden. Collapse followed, and a final Mexican mining venture failed to save Tabor. Appointed Denver postmaster in 1898, he died on April 10, 1899.

The scandal of Tabor's divorce from Augusta Pierce and his remarriage to Elizabeth McCourt (Baby) Doe in 1883 made him a pariah to many contemporaries, but he outlived the stigma. Douglas Moore's opera *The Ballad of Baby Doe* (1955) is based on the event.