



# New Idria Quicksilver: History of the New Idria Mining District

*Ray Iddings*

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## **New Idria Quicksilver: History of the New Idria Mining District** Ray Iddings

While the term mercury belonged to the language of science, quicksilver was the term commonly used by capitalist and miners. This book is the complete history of the New Idria Quicksilver Mining District. New Idria was once a thriving community lost away on the eastern slope of Central California's Coast Range. Measured by total production, New Idria was the world's fourth largest quicksilver mine, and for a time the world's largest producer. Today it is a decrepit ghost town—population zero. This book tells in detail how an 1852 silver mining scam led to discovery of rich cinnabar deposits, and development of a valuable mining company that created enormous wealth for several California capitalist. The value of this mine attracted land fraud claims that created 38 years of legal turmoil and tainted many of Washington's aspiring politicians. This book describes the litigious struggle and the various companies owning this mine during its history. The company town of New Idria was an oasis of civility surrounded by California's badlands. The first prospectors into these rugged mountains, while contending with grizzly bears and dangerous outlaws, found protection in an association with the famous bandit Joaquin Murrieta. Doctors and engineers came as the community grew, and a school, postoffice, and churches were built. Roads and hotels were constructed, and families grew as miners changed the landscape by removing 20 million tons of rock from the mountain. The nearby towns of Picacho and Syncline came, and went. This region of once bustling industry, moved by thunderous dynamite and roaring bulldozers ... today lies silent. However, New Idria's story continues today, because the discovery of this cinnabar (the ore of mercury) in 1854 sparked many technological developments that forever changed ore processing worldwide. Although now a bygone era, New Idria left many important achievements upon the world stage. One example is the first successful seal-air rotary furnace that forever changed ore processing and later created a method for environmentally safe waste incineration, was developed at New Idria. Another example is development of tactical fire fighting methods using four-wheel drive vehicles, portable radios and mobile field support for combating wildfires. These firefighting techniques were first used when the U. S. Army saved New Idria from a wildfire during WWII when the fire threatened mercury production, a strategic ore needed to win the war. These are a few of the stories of New Idria's history told in this book. **New Idria Quicksilver: History of the New Idria Mining District** is the definitive and factual history of this important piece of the California story.

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