

1860 – Barco Mining Company and the Civil War

Following the secure ownership of his property, Smith expanded his mining operations and officially established the Barco Mining Company. California was in the midst of a [bustling gold rush](#), and the Smith family diligently extracted the rich deposits of gold they had discovered within the Ship Mountains. A narrow-gauge rail system was installed, leading from the plateau into the caves and descending into the mine. Quartz ore was excavated and transported out of the caves in small ore carts. A small on-site stamp mill was constructed to extract gold from crushed ore, with the precious metal transported to Daggett or San Diego on horseback. Later on, Wells Fargo was enlisted to provide heavily guarded stagecoach transportation to mitigate losses from bandit attacks.

Meanwhile, the United States was teetering on the brink of a civil war, primarily driven by disputes over land rights and slavery. Hailing from Philadelphia, Smith was an ardent [abolitionist](#) and pledged allegiance to the Northern Californians and the Union. As the Civil War erupted, Smith's eldest son, Wilbur (1842-1863), enlisted in the Union Army, initially serving in the [1st California Regiment](#) before being transferred to the [71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry](#), where he participated in the Battle of Gettysburg.



Smith's wealth swelled during this period as he sold his gold to Captain James Keating of San Diego, a former [Point Loma lighthouse](#) keeper and [shipyard](#) owner. Much of Smith's gold is believed to have been shipped by sea around South America's tip to the East Coast, where it supported the Union government's war efforts. Nevertheless, despite the financial gains, this period was marked by the tragic loss of Smith's eldest son, Wilbur, who perished in the [Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863](#). In honor of his son, Cameron Smith later erected a fountain with a statue of Wilbur in the Oasis Palms town square, proudly clad in his Union uniform.