

THE 1920S TO 1940S WERE TRANSFORMATIVE YEARS FOR THE U.S. SALT MINING INDUSTRY: NEW MINES, NEW METHODS AND A MAJOR NEW MARKET

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Abstract

The two-decade period from 1920 to 1940 saw the addition of several underground salt mines in the United States, adding to continued operation of most of the earlier generations of mines in New York, Louisiana, and Kansas. Texas was added as a rock salt producing state. By the end of the 1920s, longstanding mining operations in New York and Louisiana transitioned from mule-driven hauling to fully mechanized operations. Improvements in drilling, blasting, mucking, and hauling operations changed pillar patterns to a more modern geometric pattern and necessitated that many mines improve ventilation and add shafts for that purpose. The advent of mechanical refrigeration resulted in a steady decline in sales to ice cream manufacturers, but transportation-related applications and sales to the chemical industry during the 1930s helped offset the loss of that major market. Experimentation with salt use for road deicing started as early as 1925 but did not develop significantly until the early 1940s. Deicing remains the mainstay of the U.S. underground salt mining industry to this day.

Research on the history of the salt industry for this transformative period is more challenging than for the prior periods, because much less appears to be reported in state and federal geological survey publications. The last major federal government publication on salt for the early era [Phalen, 1919] does not cover the period of interest. Consequently, vintage newspaper articles, used in combination with corporate research, marketing materials, history books and papers, and corporate websites, serve as important primary references for historical reconstruction of the changes in the industry players, the markets and technological advances made during the period between the wars.

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