

Thar's Gold in Them Thar Hills

By Don & Diane Wells

“Thar’s Gold in Them Thar Hills” is a publication of the Digital Library of Georgia documenting the gold rush of Northeast Georgia from 1829 to the 1930’s. The publication is a compilation of photographs, picture postcards, and documents. It indicates that interest in gold mining occurred not only during the gold rush of the mid 1800’s but also during the time of Reconstruction, at the turn of the century, and during the depression of the 1920’s and 1930’s. Today, people are again taking to the streams and rivers in the gold country to try their luck. Spending a day or two panning for gold would be a pretty good weekend outing.

The historic gold mining saga of Northeast Georgia is well known. One can visit old mines and the Dahlonega Mint to see more of the part of Georgia’s history. However, Dahlonega and Lumpkin County were not the only locations for gold miners. Records show that there were five hundred gold mines and prospecting and panning locations in the state. One of the less well known locations was today’s Dawson County, probably because there was little success in the miner’s efforts there. Never-the-less it is part of the history: and, the story of gold mining in Dawson County should be told.

The Early Pioneer/Prospector Families in Dawson County

Two of the best know families that caught the gold fever were the Spriggs and the Summerour’s. Both of these families migrated to the New World under British rule in the 1700’s and traveled south to find a new life for their families. Heinrick Summerour’s family moved to the area of Catawba County, NC; John Spriggs family located in the area of Greenville, SC. Both families prospered on large land tracks they acquired. Beginning in the 1820’s, descendants of Heinrick and John moved to GA as part of the expanding colonization as more territory was ceded by the Cherokees and Creek Indians. In 1820, Henry Summerour, III moved initially to Walton County where his son John Lafayette Summerour was born at the fascinatingly named town of Between, GA in 1827. Sometime after gold was found in the Cherokee Nation, the Summerours moved north to Lumpkin County to mine gold.

John T. Spriggs was in north GA in 1814 as part of the South Carolina Volunteers where he discovered Cockran Falls. Around 1827, he negotiated with the Cherokees to allow him to move his family to the area of Amicalola and Cockran Falls in the Cherokee territory. He built a grist mill to grind corn for the Cherokees and began to clear land for a large plantation. The Spriggs family was one of the earliest white families to live among the Cherokees.

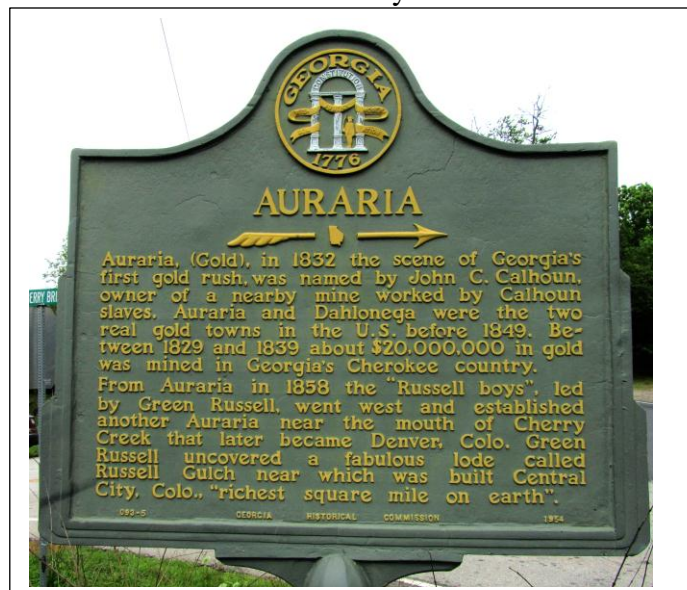
Other settlers began to move into the area to start new lives, many of them as farmers. Before 1829, gold had not yet sounded its siren’s call. When gold was discovered though, the migration began in earnest.

Gold is Discovered

In 1817, the Cherokees ceded lands between the Chattahoochee and Chestatee Rivers in North GA as part of a larger treaty which included opening new lands for the Cherokees in Arkansas territory. Thus, land in Habersham, White, Hall and Rabun Counties and small parts of Lumpkin and Union Counties were opened for settlement. The Chestatee River remained the eastern boundary for the Cherokee territory until 1830 when the State of GA took the remainder of the Cherokee territory by enacting laws to seize the lands.

In 1829, gold was discovered in Habersham and White Counties and therein began what is commonly referred to as “The Great Intrusion.” While the counties formed from the ceding of lands in the 1817 treaty were certainly open to mining claims and operations, the Cherokee Nation west of the Chestatee River was not. That didn’t stop the thousands of miners who caught the gold fever and headed to every stream in North GA looking to make money by mining gold.

Georgia gave up its claim to the lands between the Chattahoochee and Mississippi in 1802 in return for the US government’s promise of removing the Indians from GA. By 1827, the last of the Creek Indians had left but the Cherokees remained in North GA. The GA Legislature got tired of waiting on the US government to act so they passed their own laws and seized the Cherokee Territory on 1 June 1830 after gold was discovered. The Congress finally passed the Indian Removal Act and the President signed it on 28 May 1830 to forcible remove all Indians to west of the Mississippi River. By 1832, the State of GA had surveyed all remaining Cherokee territory and it was given away to residents of GA in the 1832 Land Lottery. New counties were formed including Lumpkin, Gilmer, Union, Forsyth and Cherokee Counties. Many of the Land Lottery recipients did not occupy their newly acquired land as the Cherokees did not leave. The Cherokees pleaded their case to the U.S. Supreme Court. They claimed that the U.S. did not have the right to take territory of a separate nation. They won their case but the US. Army rather than follow the court’s decision, forcibly removed any remaining Cherokees in 1838 and marched them to OK in the Trail of Tears.



With the thousands of unauthorized settlers in the Cherokee territory, new towns sprung up to provide services and some amount of civil control. Auraria, GA, originally called Nuckollsville, about five miles south of Dahlonega in now Dawson County became a town almost overnight and had 1,000 residents by 1832 when Lumpkin County was just being formed.

Some reports indicate that in 1830 over 300 ounces of gold per day were being produced in the Cherokee territory. In the coming years, hydraulic mining would get its start and with it gold production would increase.

Thar's Gold in Them Thar Hills – Part 2

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Twenty-Niners

In 1829 when gold was discovered in North GA and the Cherokee Territory, people poured into the area. They began mining gold wherever they could find a spot to claim. Trouble was that most of the area to be mined was in Cherokee Territory and it belonged to the Cherokee's. Georgia didn't seize the Cherokee Land until 1 June 1830 and didn't survey it for Land Lottery until 1831-1832. Further the Cherokees did not leave until they were forced off their lands in mid-1838. So the miners on Cherokee lands were first trespassing and secondly, there was no guarantee that they could keep the land unless they brought it off of the person who won the Land Lottery. For the best gold producing Land Lots, miners with money quickly sought out the lucky Lottery owner and tried to buy the property for hefty sums. In other cases, the miner simply didn't tell the owner they were mining their property.

The Gold Fever stories of GA, CA and Alaska are all the same. Gold attracted all sorts of people. Some were honest folks trying to seek their fortune. But among those that were attracted were also thieves, gamblers and murderers. There are many stories of the lawlessness that was prevalent in the mining towns and areas and Georgia was no different. The town of Auraria, GA just north of Dawson County on the corner of Auraria and Castleberry Bridge Roads grew to over 1,000 people in the matter of one year. In the book, *Auraria, The Story of a Georgia Gold Mining Town*, E. Merton Coulter said, "Here on this 40-acre gold lot there were one hundred dwelling houses, eighteen or twenty stores; twelve or fifteen law offices; and four or five Taverns, etc.." Henry Summerour, III owned one of the dry-goods stores in Auraria and the family also owned several of the town lots. Henry's oldest son Harrison learned the dry-goods trade from his father and later opened a dry-goods store in Hightower, also called Frogtown in Forsyth County where more gold mining was taking place.

The Spriggs-Summerour Mining Adventures

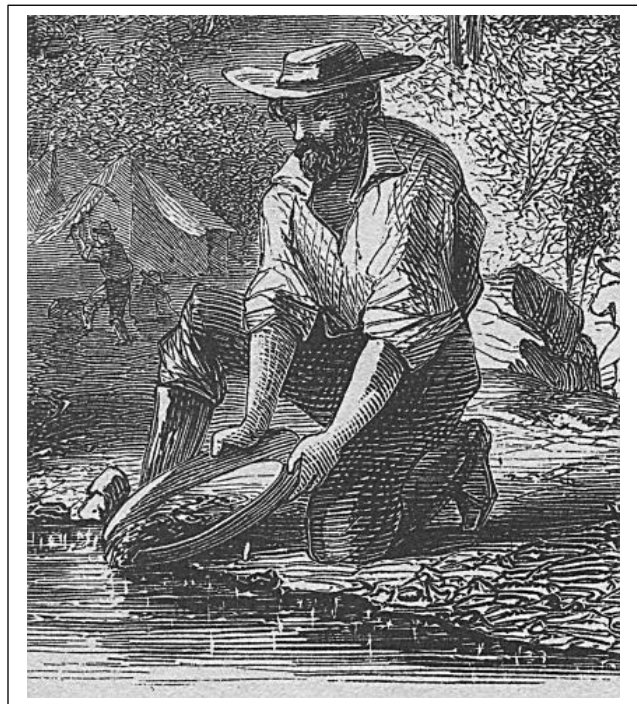
The Spriggs and Summerour families arrived in Lumpkin County (now Dawson) better off than many families. In 1843 John. T. Spriggs bought over 400 acres at a cost of \$4,000 from Harrison Summerour to build a plantation straddling Cochran Creek between Rt. 52 and Rt. 136 near the town of Amicalola. A check of the Lumpkin County Court records failed to determine when and how Harrison acquired so much property but it is assumed he was buying up property from the 1832 Land Lottery winners. At the time of the sale, Harrison was only 32 years old.

The Henry Summerour, III family arrived in Lumpkin around 1829-1830 and opened a dry goods store in Auraria. They obviously arrived with money in their pocket because they quickly started acquiring land as indicated in the Lumpkin County court house records.

As far as the records that can be found show, neither John T. Spriggs nor Henry Summerour, III got involved in gold mining other than to own property where gold mining was occurring. John T. Spriggs is said to have loaned his slaves for mining when they were not working the plantation. The Spriggs-Summerour children however caught the gold fever at a young age and were involved in many gold mining adventures.

The primary children of John T. and Henry, III that were involved in gold mining were John, Ezekiel, and Zion Spriggs and Benjamin and John L. Summerour. None of them were old enough to be involved at the start of the 1829 gold rush but certainly gained a lot of experience in placer gold mining methods throughout the Twenty-Niner period.

For the most part, the gold mining done by the Twenty-Niners was with primitive tools for placer mining. Panning is the simplest technique to extract gold from placer ore. In panning, a large metal or plastic pan is used to agitate the streambed alluvial deposits that contain gold particles thus allowing the heavier metal to go to the bottom and the less heavy materials to be washed away. The next step up from panning is to use a sluice box. The sluice box allows for larger amounts of alluvial deposits to be handled by placing shovels full of deposits into sluice box with water diverted from the stream to wash over the material. Across the box bottom are riffles which might look like a large washboard that trap the heavy deposits as the material is washed over them. A step above the static sluice box is the rocker. This works like a sluice box but in this case the material is washed across the rocker which has screen wire to sift the sands and separated the heavy gold materials.



Toward the end of the 1840's, the GA gold that could be mined using placer mining techniques was running out and those with the gold mining fever were looking for another place to go. In 1849, twenty years after gold was discovered in GA, a large gold deposit was found in California. The Forty-Niner period of gold mining had begun. Benjamin Franklin Summerour, 32, and his younger brother John Lafayette Summerour, 22 who had married Amilda Spriggs when she was 15 headed for California with many other gold fever miners. Many that went to

California did not find a lot of gold but Benjamin and John did. One family member said that John L. arrived back in GA in 1853 with 14,000 pennyweights of gold (around \$7,800 at 1853 value of gold).

Throughout the 1850's and 1860's, the Spriggs-Summerour team began numerous mining operations, some that were recorded in state records and some that were not. These operations were mostly involved with hydraulic mining by diverting water from streams into hand dug ditches to get the water to the mine with a sufficient hydraulic head of water to power the nozzle blasting the soil from river embankments and hills where the gold deposits could be found. Ken Spriggs, a Spriggs decedent, described the Sixty Mine as having been built by the Spriggs-Summerour team. They took water from the Little Amicalola River and sent it in a ditch 19 miles to the SE toward Auraria to support mining operations. In 1858, the GA Legislative Documents recorded an Act to incorporate the Springer Mountain Gold and Copper Company with Ezekiel and Zion Springs and John L. Summerour as officers. The company was incorporated to mine in Lumpkin, Union, Gilmer, Pickens, Fannin, Habersham, Forsyth and Cherokee Counties. The capitol stock in the company was set at \$500,000 with a cap at \$1 million. Prior to incorporating the Springer Mt mine, they also incorporated the Georgia Water Path Gold and Copper Company in Gilmer County in 1856 to mine the White Path and Turnip Town Creeks. Each Legislative Act gave the miners the right to "locate and construct by, through, or over any vacant land within a county not represented by legal owners, their main canal, ditch, flume trussel work or aqueduct, by diverting the streams of names creeks." Each act also allowed them to dam up the creek as needed. Therein began the environmental destruction of North GA by mining activities.

Thar's Gold in Them Thar Hills – Part 3

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In November 1857, John Spriggs died leaving his vast land holding along Cochran Creek and other areas around the town of Amicalola to his sons and daughters. They continued to expand the size of this plantation until the Civil War began in 1861. In 1861, after the death of John, large blocks of the land were sold to pay off debts and transfer assets. Sympathies varied among the people of North GA with some siding with the North and some with the South. The Spriggs signed up to fight for the Confederates and headed off to war leaving the plantation mostly unguarded except for those too old or too young to fight and their slaves. Gangs known as the Home Guard attacked the plantation at times and stole horses and supplies. By the end of the war, when the Spriggs men returned, they were completely broke. They had to start selling off some of their land holdings and they had to release all their slaves.

Restarting gold mining was tough since they had little money to pursue this livelihood. The Spriggs-Summerours nevertheless still had control of water to be used in hydraulic mining and their remaining land holdings where gold had been discovered. Just after the war, John

Summerour was still actively pursuing gold mining. He sold a quarter interest in a large gold mine that he controlled near Poverty Creek in Lumpkin County.

Kin Mori Mine

After the war, the “carpetbaggers” started roaming the south looking for a fast buck. Some of those “carpetbaggers” had money to invest and decided to invest in gold mining. This was a risky endeavor considering many of the gold mines had already played out and the only way to expand the gold mining was through major hydraulic mining efforts or tunneling into the hills.

Charles Short of Hamilton County, Ohio and Charles Mitchell of Kentucky in 1881 did research on Dawson County and decided they knew where the best place to construct a mine was and they pursued the development of the largest mine in Dawson County. On October, 28 1881 for the sum of \$35,650, the Kin Mori Mining Company bought 16 Land Lottery Lots for a total of 640 acres located in the present day Atlanta Tract of the Dawson Forest. One has to wonder about this purchase as this was not a place of previous gold mining although some reports say that the Cherokees had mined this area.

The only way to mine the area of the Kin Mori mine was to use hydraulic mining. That method of mining required a lot of water under high pressure. The Etowah River and Shoal Creek were nearby but too low in elevation to be used for the hydraulic mining since you needed a large head of water and sufficient supply to power the hydraulic nozzle. To get the water they needed for this operation, they went all the way north to Nibblewill Creek in Lumpkin County near current Rt. 52 to intercept the water supply and transport that water 33 miles south to the mine site. This by itself was a major engineering task. Charles Short signed land deed leases with seven land owners gaining access to their property in order to build a hand-dug water-ditch across their land. The ditch was to be 6 feet wide at the top and 2 ft. wide at the bottom and have about four feet of water in the ditch. This size ditch would carry the required amount of water to support the mining operation. The total cost of building the 33 mile ditch was \$40,000. There are few records of the building of this ditch but it appears John Summerour did the layout for the ditch. It was necessary to keep the slopes of the ditch correct along the 33 mile length for steady water flow. It took two years to build the ditch. Although no records can be found, it appears that Chinese workers were brought into Dawson County to build the ditch. Chinese workers were being used in Lumpkin County near Dahlonega to dig the water ditches. These workers operated from several camp locations along the ditch route.

The original deed for the mine allowed Kin Mori mine to access normally 600 miner inches of water and to design for a capacity of 1,000 inches. Each state defined miner inch of water a bit differently. In GA, a miner’s inch is between 1.5 and 1.6 cubic feet of water per minute. Therefore, the Kin Mori Mine was extracting 900 cubic feet of water per minute from the small Nibblewill Creek. In the 1880’s, perhaps Nibblewill Creek was much larger, but in today’s times, 900 cu. ft./min would probably dry up the creek beyond the extraction point.

When one reads the court records and legislative documents for authorizing the mining industry in GA in the 1800-1900's, it doesn't take long to be shocked at what environmental destruction was allowed with no responsibilities to clean it up after they were finished. A mining company could dam up a creek/branch and divert its flow, build sluice boxes and remove large quantities of river embankments to get at the

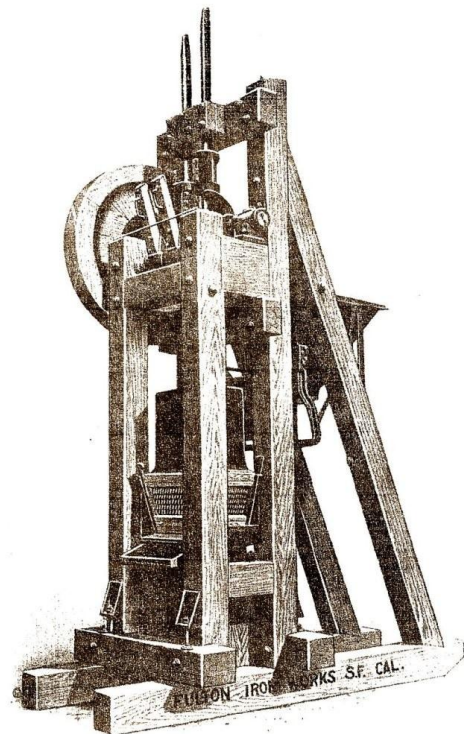


Kin Mori Mine Water Ditch

potential gold. They had the right to use mercury to separate the gold from the tailings and were not requirement to recover this toxic material from harming the environment.

According to A Preliminary Report on a part of the Gold Deposits of Georgia published in 1896 and written by W.S. Yeates, State Geologist, the Kin Mori Mine received its first supply of water in the early part of 1883 and immediately began mining Bean Branch. With water pressure of 175 ft. of head and a Number 15 Hydraulic Giant Nozzle, they worked 50 ft. on either side of the branch and blasted out the soil running it downstream in sluice boxes to find the gold. They also worked portions of Harris Branch which drains into the Etowah River. The biggest operation however, was mining the Etowah River.

The property deed for the Kin Mori Mine gave the company the rights to dam up the Etowah River and to divert its flow in a large sluice or raceway in order to dry up the river bed so that it could be mined. Further, they had the right to



Stamp Mill

dump tailings from mining up stream on Bean and Harris Branch into the river bottom for collecting and processing it in a 30 Stamp Mill to be erected on Harris Branch.

Thar's Gold in Them Thar Hills – Part 4

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Kin Mori Mine

As reported in last month's Part 3 of this series, the Kin Mori Mine began operations in the early part of 1883. Water in the Nibblewill Ditch had reached the area above the mine and was being stored in a large holding pond. From the pond, the water was transported downhill to the mine location in large pipes which were connected to the hydraulic mining nozzle. With sufficient water supply, high pressure, and the use of the hydraulic nozzle, large quantities of soil were removed from the embankments of Bean and Harris Branch Creeks. It has been estimated that over 300,000 cubic yards of soil and rock were blasted from the area and pushed downstream to the stamp mill. The area surrounding the mine has recovered with new understory growth but the effects of the mining can still be seen in the unnatural lay of the land. Large mounds of tailings can be seen along the creeks and ravines.

According to A Preliminary Report on a part of the Gold Deposits of Georgia published in 1896 and written by W.S. Yeates, State Geologist, the tailings from mining up stream on Bean and Harris Branch were send downstream into the Etowah River bottom for collecting and processing in a 30 Stamp Mill erected on Harris Branch above the river. The land deed for the Kin Mori mining operations allowed the company to dam up the Etowah River in order to dry out a portion of the river bed where tailings could be dumped and the river bed mined using hydraulic mining methods. The part of the river bed that was mined was known as Hugh's Shoal which was part of the Quarles belt of gold deposits.

W. S. Yeates report on the Kin Mori mine stated that the mining company had used a Hydraulic Gravel Elevator to move the gold bearing tailings from the river bottom uphill to the stamp mill. The hydraulic gravel elevator used 300 feet of water pressure head to push the sand, clay and gravel 40 feet above the river to the stamp mill where the rock was crushed to find the gold. The cost of all this equipment and operations must have been significant and reduced the profit margin for the mine.

The Kin Mori mine operated for only five years until early 1888 when operations were suspended indefinitely. No records can be found of how much gold was obtained from the Kin Mori Mine but it is doubtful that the mine was profitable and, in fact, probably lost a lot of money.

The M'Guire Mine

Adjacent to the Kin Mori Mine on the east side of the property was the M'Guire Mine. Where the Kin Mori mine spent a lot of money and went broke mining for gold, the M'Guire Mine in the 1880's extracted \$15,750 worth of gold from a small vein in a very short amount of time near the center of the land lot where the mine was located. Seventy-five yards further east of the M'Guire mine vein was another one called the Whippoorwill vein which also produced gold.

Other Gold Mining in Dawson County

Dredging

Many of the gold mining operations in Dawson County considered the Etowah River bottom to be a valuable source of gold. However, getting to the river bottom was an expensive operation. Damming up the river as the Kin Mori Mine did was difficult. It was almost impossible to hold back the river to dry up the river bed to access it. Some mining entrepreneurs decided to mine the river bottom using dredges to suck out the loose river bottom material and pass it through sluice boxes with riffles to separate the heavier gold from the lighter weight soil. It was an expensive undertaking to build a dredge and work large sections of the river. In the section of the Etowah River between Rt. 52 and Rt. 136 sits the remains of a dredge built to mine the river bottom. That dredge never moved probably due to the river being too low for navigation of the dredge. After mining the river near the dredge, it was shut down and today there is little left of this historical mining operation. It is not known if the dredging operation was profitable but since the dredge didn't move from where it was built, it probably went broke like many other gold mining operations.

Diverting the Etowah River

Approximately three and one half miles north of the point where Rt. 136 crosses the Etowah River and not far north of the dredging operation, the Etowah River makes a large "U" shaped turn to the west with the distance at the top of the "U" being about one quarter of a mile across. Again the entrepreneurial gold mining spirit seemed to have pushed aside all cost considerations for mining the Etowah River. The Phoenix Gold Mining Company of St. Louis MO in March 1892 bought 15 forty acre gold lots along the Etowah River and tributary creeks in Land Lottery District 13 of Section 1. There seems to have been some legal issues on the land ownership between the Phoenix and Etowah River Mining Company's so it's uncertain as to who did the mining for the river. However, one of these companies decided to dig a tunnel about 1/4 mile long across the top of the "U" for the purpose of diverting the river through the tunnel and thus drying up the river bed in the "U" of the river. They obviously began digging the tunnel through the rock ridge from both sides of the river. There is a 13 foot drop in elevation on the river from the upstream side to the downstream side. It is assumed the tunneling was to join perfectly in the middle of the ridge. However, they missed connecting the two tunnel parts by a two foot elevation difference in the middle of the tunnel. Today, this tunnel is one of the more exciting

canoe/kayak rides around. Imagine racing through a dark tunnel with rushing water making the 13 foot drop in elevation plus the two foot unexpected drop in the middle of the tunnel.

It is assumed that when the tunnel was completed the river was dammed up enough to divert most of the river through the tunnel thus exposing almost one mile of river bottom which could then be mined using hydraulic methods. Little is known of this operation other than the tunnel remains today as a reminder of gold mining operations in Dawson County.