

Haile Gold Mine

by Louise Pettus

In 1827, Col. Benjamin Haile (1768-1842), a large landowner in Lancaster District, heard about gold being discovered in Charlotte.

Panning for gold in the stream gravels on his 1,000 acre plantation, Haile found enough of the shiny flecks to encourage him to seek out the source of the talcose slate beds above the streams.

In 1828 Haile sent a shipment of gold to the U. S. Mint in Philadelphia. It was the first domestic gold sent outside South Carolina.

In 1837 Haile set up a five-stamp mill and concentrated on processing the ore. Haile leased his land in 50-square-foot plots to neighboring planters, who used slave labor to work the plots. The richest plots produced some gold nuggets valued at \$300 to \$500 in the currency of the day.

Surface mining reached about 25 feet in depth. After that point the operation became increasingly unprofitable.

Col. Haile, a native Virginian, became a man of increasing prominence. He was elected to the S. C. legislature and was a member of the South Carolina College (now USC) Board of Trustees.

Haile's heirs worked the mine for a period and then leased the entire 1,900 acres to the Taylor brothers of Charlotte for \$20,000 in Confederate money. They had an agreement with the Confederate government to furnish gold and other minerals for the war effort.

The Haile Gold Mine was a special target of Sherman's troops. The equipment was wrecked and the Haile family lost all control of the property. James Ethridge, the New Yorker who owned the Hobkirk Inn in Camden, acquired ownership of the mine.

Underground mining was tried for the first time but was not successful. Finally, in 188, the mining company in desperation brought in Dr. Adolph Thies. Thies was a native German trained in metallurgy with worldwide experience as a mining engineer.

Thies developed a new process for extracting the gold from the low-grade sulfite ore. The process became known in mining literature as "Thies Barrel Chlorination Process."

The 1890s might be called the "Golden Age" of the mine. The mine increased in size to 60 stamps, a narrow gauge railroad was built, and diamond drilling resulted in 100 tons of ore a day for processing.

In 1904 Thies retired and left two of his four sons to supervise the Haile Gold Mine.

"Dolph" supervised the drilling, did the surveying and assayed the gold. Ernest Thies, a graduate of the Colorado School of Mines, was the general manager.

Ernest Thies grew beautiful roses in abundance and, using a secret formula, concocted from the rose petals an ointment known as "Thies Salve." The salve was widely sold for use on all sorts of skin irritations.

The "Golden Age" of the Haile Gold Mine came to a sudden end on Aug. 10, 1908. That morning, the big 150-horsepower boiler in the concentration room exploded. The force blew the smokestack 100 feet in the air, turned the boiler inside out and scattered building parts over the neighborhood.

"Cap'n Ernest," age 40, and two others were killed. The disaster marked the beginning of the end of the mine. The mine was closed in 1912.

During World War I the mine was reopened to mine pyrite for the war effort.

After the war an attempt was made to reestablish the gold mining operations without much success. The end of gold mining came in 1942 when the World War II draft made it impossible to get workers.

The Haile Gold Mine had lasted longer and produced more than any other gold mine in the Eastern United States.