

THE SAGA OF THE FORGOTTEN MINE

You have just completed your visit to what we believe to be one of the most famous "gold rush" sites in the historic "Mother Lode."

As you sit here and contemplate the beauty of this setting high above the river on a warm sunny afternoon, imagine if you will the excitement of hundreds of young men searching for gold in the river below. In a census taken in 1852 as part of the process of separating Sierra County from Yuba County, it is documented that there were some 4855 individuals living in Sierra County of which 107 were women and 85% of whom were under the age of 35, each working his special claim in the rivers for its riches. Many of the men believed that the gold in the river had been laid down by an ancient "comet" which had passed over and deposited the riches.

Many however came to know that the gold indeed had actually come out of the ancient hills from the bed of old tertiary rivers and out of rock formations. Therefore, they started to look to the hills for the sources of such riches.

Imagine if you will in this area of such beauty "why here?" In 1851 or 1852 several young men followed the lead of a young man by the name of James Finney to this spot and at his insistence started to dig into the rock looking for gold. It is well documented that in 1853 according to a study completed by "Garcia and Associates" that one of the 3 largest hunks of gold ever found in the world came out of this mine. It weighed in at 5009 ounces containing some 10% quartz and was assayed at \$84,302, a fortune indeed in the context of its time. It was displayed in San Francisco for a year and a half and then sent on to New York where history has lost its trail. It is recorded that it was in the form of a dumbbell and had been broken by "Finney's" pick as he was removing it. So they bored a hole into the hunks

and reconnected the nugget by a piece of pipe.

In the early days, the "ore" or rock was trundled out of the mine in wooden wheelbarrows and pushed over the bank and down the hill to an arrastre built in the bend of the river where it was crushed.

Many years later, in 1933, after Finney had abandoned the mine and moved on, the "York" brothers the 3 sons of "Con York" who owned the Downieville Foundry opened a tunnel at the river level and drove a shaft upwards following the quartz vein up to this mine and dropped the ore to the lower level where it was loaded onto ore cars and out to the arrastre. Records show that they were very successful getting as much as \$15.00 in gold per ton of ore.

Now the story does not end here. James Finney was a young man, only 26 years of age in the census of 1852, came from Virginia, and a very close friend of "John Barleycorn." In moods of reflection he often sang excerpts of the song "Carry me Back to Ole Virginny." He became known as ole Virginny. He must have felt very much "out of place" with the robust, raucous young men of the area and he had heard of "gold" being discovered in Nevada so he made his way over there. At about this time a young man of some 32 years of age by the name of John Mackay, who had done very well in his placer claim up on "Slug Canyon" and also a friend of old Finney, made his way over to Nevada.

The coincidences do not end here. In Downieville a barber and a former major in the California Militia by the name of Hungerford had a 16-year-old daughter who had married a local doctor by the name of Bryant. Dr. Bryant succumbed to an overdose of drugs 2 years later. History does not tell us if it was intentional or accidental. Hungerford felt much compassion for his daughter being a young bride and only one of some one hundred women in town with 4 or 5 thousand young men, so he took her and they

also went over to Nevada.

All of these old friends met in Nevada together with a couple of other old friends and of course needed to locate a claim in the search of gold. It is reported that in one such exploratory excursion into the hills, ole Finney exclaimed "Boys, I think we may find gold right in here." Because of their knowledge that Finney had discovered the large nugget while in Downieville, they believed in him and started to prospect. Indeed they did find much gold.

Now the early miners in and around Mt. Davidson were having a very tough time of it mining for gold as they kept encountering a "blue mud" that was a nuisance, however, Mackay and Finney, using Finney's wealth, proceeded to buy up many of the claims and started the "Comstock" so named after one of ole Finney's friends.

Miners poured into the area and a town was built with many bars and houses of pleasure were opened to entertain the young men. One day so the story goes, ole Finney was going home from the pub clutching the remains of a bottle of good whiskey when he stumbled and fell to the ground. As he was laying there and contemplating the "good liquor" slowly soaking into the ground he exclaimed "I now christen thee Virginny City" and Virginia City was thusly named.

John Mackay who had known Hungerford's daughter in Downieville eventually married her. He became very wealthy and a prominent figure in the development of the mines. Their granddaughter later married Irving Berlin.

Poor ole Finney or "Ole Virginny" one evening in 1861 whilst on his way home from the pub and riding his "donkey" apparently fell off the animal hitting his head on a rock and died a rather unglorious death. On May 27, 2001, nearly 150 years later, ole Finney was memorialized as the founder of the Comstock where he is buried in Dayton, Nevada.

We all know the saga of the "Comstock," the Blue Mud turned out to be silver which needed processing to remove the silver from the ore hence the introduction of Sutro and many others into the mines and the immense wealth of the silver ore. These barons drove the West to East leg of the Transcontinental Rail Road and Sutro later became Mayor of San Francisco. The Civil War was started in 1860 and won by the North not because of the superior soldiers but rather by the wealth pouring into the factories of the North from the gold and silver fields of California and Nevada.

CAN WE NOT SAY THAT THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT WAS DIRECTLY INFLUENCED BY THIS MINE? WE HAVE RENAMED THE MINE "THE 2ND CHANCE" SO THAT IT MAY BE GIVEN ITS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN HISTORY.

To our Guests:

We sincerely hope that you have enjoyed your visit to this very historic old mine.

This mine is yours and is a part of the National Forest. It has been redeemed and is being managed through the efforts of the "Downieville Foundry and Historical Park Co.," a nonprofit 501-C-3 corporation dedicated to the preservation of our national treasures of the Mother Lode in and around Downieville.

Your donations in support of our efforts will be greatly appreciated. If you have not done so, we would urge you to visit our museum in the old Foundry Building on Pearl Street.

If you have any further questions, you may call me at 530-289-3261. It has been our pleasure to welcome you to our community.

Leonard V. Kinzler
President & C.E.O.

AVAILABILITY

At the present time, the mine is only open to the public by reservation. For a reservation, please call 530-289-3261.

ENTRANCE FEES

There are no entrance fees. The mine is situated on public land within the National Forest and is managed by the U.S. Forest Service.

The mine is operated for your enjoyment by the Downieville Foundry and Historical Park Co.

FUTURE PLANS

It is anticipated that as funds are available, we will be able to offer random access and an audio presentation of the geological and biological wonders of the trail for your enjoyment.

2nd Chance Mine Tour



The Saga of the Forgotten Mine

Downieville - Sierra County

presented by
Downieville Foundry and
Historical Park Co.

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