

THE FOSTER GOLD MINE

It had been known for many years that quartz rock found in western Rhode Island contained gold. But the yellow metal never had been found in large enough quantity to be extracted at a profit.

Toward the end of the last century John Avery Perry said he had found a vein of quartz in the town of Foster that promised well. Born in 1824, in Tiverton Rhode Island, a member of the family of the two Commodore Perrys, he became a Fortyniner, spending about 5 years in California learning a lot about gold ore and gold mining.

He married Ellathea Harrington of Foster and in the middle 1890's, in the twilight of life, went to live on her ancestral farm in Foster.

Those acres were a part of the original large holdings of the Mocsup Valley Harringtons. The land was in an isolated position, approached by a long lane from the Cucumber Hill Road and by a shorter one from a cross road that joins the Cucumber Hill and Bennett Hill roads.

The story of the discovery seems to be, that after Perry had lived there for a while he came across a piece of rusty white quartz that he told his wife looked just like the gold bearing quartz of California, yet, probably was not worth anything. Still, might it be that it did contain gold? So, amid memories of the old California days, he got out his kit and tested it as he was wont to do. Sure enough, there were flecks of the yellow metal. This led him to send a sample to Providence to be assayed. The report showed something over \$2.00 of gold per ton of ore.

Thus encouraged, he found the quartz vein and dug into it. As the story goes, the deeper he dug the better the samples assayed and there seemed to be plenty of it.

Along in 1899 John's son Adelbert J. Perry (Del he was called), returned from the west coast. He had spent some time in the gold fields and had taken a course in mining engineering.

Del agreed with his father that the prospect looked good. They found samples that assayed \$7.00 to \$10.00 per ton. The problem was to develop it

They found two prominent Foster residents who became very enthusiastic about the venture. They were Clarke H. Johnson, judge in one of the District Courts of Rhode Island, and Curtis Foster, son of a well known building contractor. Judge Johnson's farm almost touched the gold mine property and Curtis lived only about a mile away.



MILL OF HOMESTRIKE GOLD MINE, FOSTER, R. I.

With Del they formed a company they called the Homestrike Mining Co., for which they received a charter Feb. 14, 1900. Capital was \$150,000.00, par value of shares \$10.00. They had the right to mine gold, silver, nickel and other metals, refine and treat same. Johnson was President and Daniel P. Williams Secretary-Treasurer.

On April 3, Del and his brother Dr. Ezra H. Perry of Providence received a charter for mining only, which they called the Pioneer Mining Co. The extraction process would be carried out in the mill of the Homestrike Co. The Pioneer was also capitalized at \$150,000.00 with shares at \$10.00.

By early in 1901 it was reported that \$20,000.00 had been subscribed. By April, 1901, plans had been drawn for the mill building, presumably by Del, and erection started.

Arnold Battey, now living, and Alvero Kennedy, carpenters living in Foster, erected the mill building during April and May.

Those were busy days. Mining operations were going on, Machinery was being hauled over country roads from the Railroad station and installed. To erect the tall smokestack they had to have the help of Weaver of Providence who came out with his tackle for the purpose. A dam was being thrown across a near-by brook to store water for the boiler and the process.

The machinery consisted of a stone crusher, a pulverizer, a boiler fitted to burn cord wood, a modern steam engine, shafting, pulleys, belts, leaching tanks, a tank filled with zinc shavings to gather the gold from the cyanide solution, pumps for water and the process, an elevator to raise the ore. There also was an arrangement to dispose of the waste after the extraction of the gold.

A memorandum in Curtis Foster's note book, gives

Cost of Building.....	\$2,250.00
Machinery.....	3,633.00
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	\$5,883.00

Near by in his note book, Curtis estimated that a profit of \$1,660.00 should be realized from a 60 day run, treating ten tons of ore per day, provided the ore carried a value of at least \$6.00 per ton. From the assays, this condition should be easy to meet. Arnold Battey thinks they started the mill as soon as it was ready, early in June. The results from that first run were not what was expected. An assay report from Baker of Attleboro shows that he received on June 13, a sample of fine ore and one of rock. The fine ore gave \$1.12 per ton and the rock sample \$1.03

On July 10, 1901, Baker received another sample of fine ore in a box and another rock sample. The fine ore assayed \$1.85 per ton and the rock \$5.36.

Such results must have been very disappointing, but they kept on mining, searching for better ore. Yet, they had not found any by Aug. 1901, for samples sent by them to Darling in Providence, assayed only \$2.06, \$2.88 & \$2.06

What was the matter? Was there no more good ore to be found?

To be continued

EDITOR ON THE AIR

Mathias P. Harpin, editor of The Hinterlander, speaks every Wednesday night at 6:30 on Radio Station WWRJ, West Warwick. Each week Mr. Harpin tells a different story on some interesting phase of Rhode Island history.

Continued from last month

To save time and expense, they set up a complete assaying laboratory at the mine.

Del Perry and Curtis Foster did the assaying. Some results recorded in Foster's note book, dated Feb. 4, 1902, were as follows

Ore from Homestrike mine	
Clay from 7' level.....	\$10.30
Brown quartz.....	7.72
Roasted brown quartz.....	9.01
Brown quartz.....	12.36
Pioneer mine	
Brown quartz.....	\$ 4.49
Brown quartz by cyanide.....	.60

Results of these assays brought questions, even confusion. Something had to be done. But what? It seems that the Judge and Dr. Ezra thought much alike about it: That they should have a competent disinterested person examine the mine and report prospects.

On April 21, 1902 the Judge wrote to Curtis Foster that Williams, the Treasurer had the name of a man from the west with a recommendation. In a few days Curtis received the following letter.

"Providence, R. I April 24, 1902
Mr. Curtis Foster, Moosup Valley
Dear Friend

Judge Johnson and I are coming up with a man next Tuesday morning on the 9:09 train. Will you kindly let me know if needed supplies are in the lab.-such as crucibles, fuel, cupels &c., bicarb soda, carb. soda, carb. potash, litharge, borax glass &c., as this man wants to work out some ore before taking a position with us. Shall probably stay a day or two to get information and test ore by fire.

Yours in haste,
E. H. Perry, M. D."

The man was Fred A. Ray, from Cripple Creek Col.

In a neatly done table dated Apr. 30, 1902 is recorded the result of Ray's work.

Homestrike Mine	
1..Dark brown quartz.....	Trace of gold
2..Brown quartz Shaft No. 2.....	Trace of gold
3..Brown quartz Shaft No. 1.....	4.14
4..Fine grain quartz, dump.....	4.12
5..Quartz undercap shaft ho.....	4.12
6.. Average sample blue rock.....	2.06
7..Clay from 7' level.....	6.18
Pioneer Mine	
1..Quartz from S. side of shaft.....	Trace of gold
2..Quartz from N. side of shaft.....	2.06
3..Calico quartz from dump.....	4.12

"Assayed by Fred Ray
of Cripple Creek"

His tests of the Homestrike QUARTZ averaged \$2.40 per ton, a

little better than the \$1.85 of Baker on the second run of the mill. Quartz of the Pioneer mine averaged still less.

It became apparent to everyone concerned that the amount of gold in the run of the mine, or in the best of the ore, was so small that recovery at a profit was impossible.

There is no evidence to show that the mill was run again. Mining operations were continued, however, at least until late August 1903, because Mrs. David Fry says her husband worked there and on the last payday of Aug. there was no money forthcoming and he settled for a pair of rubber boots and a certificate for 5 shares of stock in the company.

According to an article that appeared in the Boston Sunday Globe under date of July 23, 1905, active mining operations were going on then. Presumably at the Homestrike Mine.

They were sinking a shaft at the end of "Poverty Gulch"-- a trench 400 feet long, from 3 to 20 feet deep and "wide enough to drive a pair of horses through."

It was said that the vein had been lost and it was necessary to dig that far to find it again.

No record has been found to show who was directing the work. It was not Del Perry, because he had removed to California in 1903. According to the Globe story they were down about 30 feet into the quartz and intended to go down 100 feet with tunnels following the ore wherever it proved to be good.

Records are not available to show how good or poor the ore was nor how deep the shaft was sunk. But the fact that the mill was not run again is ample evidence that they did not find ore worth while.

After operations ceased, the plant gradually disappeared. The building was first to go. All of it except the part over the boiler and engine was taken down and the salvaged lumber was shipped away from Danielson, Arnold Battey thinks to Vermont. The crusher and pulverizer may have gone to a mine near Lisbon, N. H. The boiler and engine were the last to go. Where to, no one seems to know. The dam across the brook is still there, so are several holes in the ground and "Poverty Gulch." They are about all the evidence left of the great activity that went on there fifty-five years ago.

Things mulled along until 1912 when the real estate was deeded to, J. Rollo Middlemiss of New York City. How much money, if any was involved, is not revealed in the deed. In Aug. 1915 the same property, 235 acres including lease of the Pioneer Mine was sold by sheriff to Henry A. Cors, also of New York City. Mr. Cors brought a mining engineer on to examine the property, but did nothing more. He let the charters lapse and in his will dated Aug. 17, 1920, left it to his executor, Frederick Knipping, Jr. Knipping failed to pay the taxes and it was sold at auction Oct. 23, 1936.

This probably was the most serious and costly attempt to mine gold ever to occur in Rhode Island.

I have had the help of many friends in writing this story. I am especially indebted to Mrs. Frank B. Dorman for making available Curtis Foster's correspondence and his revealing note book. Others have contributed newspaper articles, photographs, facts and memories. To all, I give many thanks.

