



Teacher's Guide:

Supplemental Texts

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Supplemental Texts

These texts offer additional information on the history of Reed Gold Mine and North Carolina's gold mining industry.

A Brief History of Reed Gold Mine

Little is known about John Reed's early life, but he either enlisted or was drafted into the Hessian militia in modern-day Germany. He trained for several months before his regiment was mobilized to aid the British during the American Revolution. Reed fought with the British until 1782 when he deserted. He travelled to North Carolina and likely found work at a gristmill. Shortly after his arrival, he married Sarah "Sally" Kiser. They had nine children and ran a farm.

In 1799 their son, Conrad, stumbled upon a 17-pound gold nugget in the creek near his family's cabin. Supposedly the Reeds used it as a doorstep for a few years. In 1802, Reed brought the nugget with him on a supply run to show to a jeweler who identified it as gold. The jeweler offered to buy the gold for whatever price Reed named. Reed suggested \$3.50, a week's pay for a farmer at the time. The jeweler gladly paid. However, the nugget was worth at least 100 times what Reed asked. At the time, it was worth about \$3,600.00.

The following year, in 1803, Reed entered a partnership with three neighbors—Reverend James Love, Martin Phifer, and Fredrick Kiser. The plan was to search for gold on land supplied by Reed and the others would supply the equipment and enslaved labor to cover more ground. Later that year, Peter, an enslaved man, discovered a 28-pound nugget worth almost \$6,000.

Gold mining changed the lives of the Reeds, especially when they began lode mining, underground mining in 1831. The underground mine became a family operation and Reed allowed only his sons and sons-in-laws to operate it until the mine closed for ten years because of a family argument.

Following Reed's death in 1845, the mine was sold to one of his grandson's and a son-in-law, Timothy Reed and Andrew Hartsell, respectively. They operated the mine under the Reed Gold and Copper Mining Company with limited success. Reed Gold Mine experienced its heyday under their leadership, with new technology and experts brought in to operate the mine.

Despite new machinery and expertise, the Reed Gold and Copper Mining Company failed in 1854, like many other gold mines. In 1855, the local sheriff auctioned the property. Little mining was done until 1895 when Reed Gold Mine was bought by Oliver S. Kelly, his son O. Warren Kelly, and Dr. Justin D. Lisle. The following year, the last large nugget was found.

Reed Gold Mine continued to operate through the early-twentieth century. Sadly, there were no more significant finds. By 1912, the Kellys stopped underground work at Reed Gold Mine. In 1971, the Kelly family donated the mine and to the State of North Carolina. In 1977, Reed Gold Mine State Historic Site officially opened to the public.

A Detailed History of Reed Gold Mine

John Reed, born Johannes Reith, was recorded by the Lutheran Church book in Salzburg as being born on 14 April 1759. He was the illegitimate son of Anna Elizabeth Reid and Johann Jakob Helmerich. When he was five, his mother married a widower named Adam Henrich Hahn.

Little is known about Reed's early life, but he either enlisted or was drafted into the Hessian militia from the Hessen-Cassel region in modern-day Germany. He served in Company 2 of the Garrison Regiment von Wissenbach and endured several months of grueling training before his regiment was mobilized to aid the British during the American Revolution.

Reed likely arrived in New York in June 1778, having travelled across the Atlantic with the second wave of Hessian troops who were intended to serve as replacements for the first wave that arrived in the Thirteen Colonies in October 1776. In November 1778, Reed's regiment sailed from New York to Georgia and assisted with the capture of Savannah in December 1778. Reed could have fought during the initial capture of Savannah; during the Siege of Savannah the following year, when Franco-American forces unsuccessfully attempted to retake the important port city; or could have arrived with later forces.

Reed remained with the British in Georgia until he deserted his post on 21 June 1782, from somewhere "outside of Savannah" and took his arms and equipment with him. Interestingly, two other men from Company 2 of the Garrison Regiment von Wissenbach also deserted the same day. It is unknown why Reed and the other men decided to desert that day, but it could have been due to rumors spreading about an impending evacuation of Savannah, which proved true in July of that year.

Whatever his motive for deserting, Reed made his way to what was then Mecklenburg County, modern day Cabarrus County, in North Carolina. Deserting was no small task, especially from the Savannah area. Members of the Tory militia, African Americans, and Native Americans were all employed to search the surrounding areas for deserters and to bring them back alive or dead. Not only that, many loyalists lived along any route Reed could have chosen. Had he been captured, the loyalists could have returned him to his commanding officer or decided to take matters into their own hands.

It is unknown what Reed did once he arrived in the Piedmont of North Carolina. There is reasonable speculation that he worked as a hired hand or farmer in a grist mill. There was a significant shortage of men to employ due to the wartime conditions. Additional evidence to support this theory is that Reed married Sarah Kiser, the daughter of the late owner, in late-1782 or 1783.

Sarah, more commonly documented as “Sally,” was the daughter of Peter Kiser and Fanny Garmon Kiser. She was born at the tail end of the Colonial period, in 1761, and grew up in Cabarrus County. Her father owned and operated a grist mill until his death in 1780 and had become successful enough to leave a respectable estate to his wife and nine children. With her a 20-year-old Sarah purchased a mare for £2,000, 10 shillings. For a poor Hessian deserter, Sally Kiser was quite the catch.

The couple had nine children that lived to maturity and steadily began purchasing land with help from Sally’s brother, Frederick Kiser. Over the years, they operated a subsistence farm, growing a little of everything in their fields to provide for their family and to sell at market. Their life together was typical of what other lower-class families until the dawn of the 19th century.

The story goes that in 1799 their son, Conrad, stumbled upon a 17-pound gold nugget in the creek near his family’s cabin. Supposedly the Reeds didn’t know what it was, so they used it as a doorstep for a few years. Once during that time, Reed brought the nugget to a silversmith in Concord, North Carolina, but the man was unable to identify the nugget as gold.

In 1802, Reed brought the nugget with him on a supply run to Fayetteville, North Carolina, to show to a jeweler. The jeweler told Reed to leave the nugget with him and, while he was gone, the jeweler melted the nugget down to a bar of gold about nine inches long. When Reed returned, the jeweler offered to buy the gold for whatever price Reed named. Reed suggested \$3.50, a week’s pay for a farmer at the time. The jeweler gladly paid.

However, the nugget was worth at least 100 times what Reed asked. At the time, it was worth about \$3,600.00. Today, it would be worth \$415,140.00. Reed later discovered that he had been cheated by the jeweler. Oral tradition reveals he returned to Fayetteville and demanded more money and received an additional \$1,000, possibly with the help from one of his neighbors.

The following year, in 1803, Reed entered into a partnership with three neighbors—Reverend James Love; Martin Phifer; and his brother-in-law, Fredrick Kiser. The plan was to search for gold on land supplied by Reed and the others would supply the equipment and enslaved labor to cover more ground. Profits were to be divided equally among the four men. Later that year, Peter, an enslaved man, discovered a 28-pound nugget worth almost \$6,000.

In later years, one of John Reed’s sons-in-law, George Barnhardt, told the story of when Peter discovered the nugget. Barnhardt said that Peter’s enslaver, Love, offered Peter the opportunity to pry a small piece off the gold nugget with his dinner fork. Love reportedly said Peter could keep the piece as a reward if he was succeeded in removing it from the nugget.

Peter, however, declined Love’s offer. He knew that his fork would not be strong enough to break a piece off the gold nugget and that his fork, a valuable possession, would be damaged. He also knew that if he attempted and failed—as he was sure to do—his enslaver and the other men present would laugh at his expense.

By 1824, haphazard digging had yielded around \$100,000 in gold. With his wealth, Reed managed to obtain the dubious honor of being one of the largest Antebellum slaveholders in North Carolina's Piedmont region. In 1804, he purchased three enslaved peoples—Charity, Dinah, and Sam. They were likely the first enslaved peoples he purchased. Some sources maintain he enslaved almost twenty African-Americans by his death.

Gold mining changed the lives of the Reeds, especially when they began lode mining, underground mining. Lode mining began in 1825 when Matthias Barringer from Montgomery County, North Carolina, was panning for gold in the creek on his farm. Along the lower part of the creek, he found many small gold nuggets, but as he followed the creek upstream there were none. He realized the gold must have washed out of the rocks on the bank of the creek.

As he walked along the stream, he spotted some white quartz rock and broke it open with a pick. To his surprise, he found a considerable amount of gold within the quartz. Barringer dug out the quartz, with help from partners and enslaved peoples, and followed it deeper and deeper into the earth. Eventually, the hole became a deep shaft with tunnels at different levels underground. Matthias Barringer became wealthy and many other gold mines started to look underground for gold in quartz.

In 1831, the first underground mining began at the Reed Mine. For unknown reasons, the original partnership was dissolved—possibly because of Love's death. After that, Reed allowed only his sons and sons-in-law to operate the mine until a legal dispute amongst the family resulted in the mine's closure for a decade.

Following Reed's death in 1845, his executors sold the mine to one of his grandson's and a son-in-law, Timothy Reed and Andrew Hartsell, respectively. The two operated the mine under the Reed Gold and Copper Mining Company with limited success, even though they used antiquated equipment.

In July 1853, the Reed Gold and Copper Mining Company purchased an additional 745 acres of land. The New York Corporation hired professional miners and installed the latest equipment, becoming one of several companies active in North Carolina following California's gold rush.

During the mid-1850s, Dr. Louis Posselt, a chemist and miner, managed Reed Gold Mine. Under his direction the mine experienced its heyday. Posselt spent considerable money developing the mine underground and erecting new surface machinery and buildings. He also built a small village, known as Brunerville. It had an engine house and millhouse, a large whim house and whim to raise ore, an office, a powder house, stables, a blacksmith shop, and 11 cabins.

Posselt instructed his employees in centuries-old European mining techniques. Miners tunneled along ore at different levels and chiseled out rooms to remove the ore. Loose ore was moved underground in low wheelbarrows. Iron kibbles, large buckets, were

used at Reed Gold Mine to hoist ore and miners up the 110-foot-deep Engine Shaft to the surface. A hoisting whim, initially powered by a single horse, accomplished this difficult work. Engine Shaft also contained a steam pump to raise water for the stamp mill and drain the mine.

A fifty-horsepower steam engine operated the pump and ore-crushing machinery that included a stamp mill. The wood-and-iron stamp mill resembled those of medieval Germany. Three large Chilean mills crushed ore to a finer size. A Chilean mill had a pair of large stone wheels for crushing ore. An arrastra, or drag-stone mill, substituted stones for the wheels of the Chilean mills. Concentrating tables used a reciprocating motion to separate gold from lighter materials. The mill workers used these steam-powered machines, with water and mercury, to catch the smallest flakes of gold before purifying it in retorts to separate the gold and mercury.

Despite new machinery and expertise, the Reed Company failed during 1854, like many other mines in the area. Tightening of the New York money market, and flagrant speculation, ruined many Carolina mines. In 1855, the local sheriff auctioned the Reed property for a quarter of its value. North Carolina gold production slipped, and the next owners did little mining.

By 1860, the mine had closed and remained so during the Civil War, along with nearly all Carolina gold mines. After the Civil War, the Reed mine changed ownership several times but little mining occurred until 1894. That year, Oliver S. Kelly, his son O. Warren Kelly, and Dr. Justin D. Lisle, visited Reed Gold Mine. The three men were looking for a gold mine to buy, and on January 10, 1895, they purchased Reed Gold Mine.

Later that year, the Kellys had a crew doing placer and lode mining at Reed Gold Mine. The new owners also leased the rights to mine the surface to a crew of local men and the last substantial nugget was found on 9 April 1896 by Jacob Shinn. The 23-pound find rekindled the owner's optimism and enthusiasm towards mining and so the Kellys ordered a cast-iron stamp mill from the Mecklenburg Iron Works of Charlotte. Once again, the Reed was typical of leading mines.

Reed Gold Mine continued to operate through the early-twentieth century. Sadly, there were no more significant finds. By 1912, the Kellys finished the last underground work at Reed Gold Mine. Gold production in Carolina dropped sharply in 1915 and never recovered despite renewed activity by panners during the Great Depression. Interest in panning for gold continued to decline and essentially came to a halt in the late-1940's and 1950's.

In 1966, Reed Gold Mine was designated a National Historic Landmark by the National Parks Service. In 1971, the Kelly family donated 70 acres of the mine to the State of North Carolina and sold the remaining 820 acres to the State of North Carolina for well below its appraised value. The State of North Carolina then began work to preserve the gold mine and its rich history. In 1977, Reed Gold Mine State Historic Site officially opened to the public.

The North Carolina Gold Rush

North Carolina's gold rush began after German immigrant John Reed discovered in 1802 that the rock he'd used for a doorstep for three years was actually gold. The news soon spread and farmers in the area began hunting in their creek beds for gold nuggets. Charlotte, a little town of some 700 citizens, grew into a booming mine town, filled with folks who hoped they could strike it rich.

The gold industry brought real change to the Piedmont. In 1837 Congress authorized building branches of the U.S. Mint in Charlotte, North Carolina; Dahlonega, Georgia; and New Orleans Louisiana. The Charlotte Mint operated from 1838 through 1861. The total worth of the gold coins struck at the mint amounted to \$5 million.

Many of the mining engineers who worked in the Piedmont's mining industry came from overseas. Some arrived from Latin America, where gold and silver had been mined for centuries. Others came from well-known mining areas in Europe. Cornish miners, English investors, German mining engineers, Italian workers—they all came to North Carolina to try their fortune. One observer claimed that over 13 languages were spoken on Charlotte's streets in the 1830s!

Some Americans had mixed feelings about the newcomers flocking to the Piedmont. On the one hand, the immigrants possessed needed skills for the new industry. Many brought funds for investing in mining ventures and mining equipment. On the other hand, North Carolinians worried those international investors and miners might exploit the state's good fortune for their own benefit.

Some observers also noted that mining had many positive effects on the local economy. For one thing, gold made it possible to pay in hard currency instead of relying on paper money. This eliminated old-fashioned and inexact trading methods. For another, property values in the Piedmont jumped between 200 and 300 hundred percent after gold was discovered. Each \$100 worth of gold produced was said to represent an additional \$75 worth of foodstuff sold to the miners.

Back in Cabarrus County, John Reed made sure his farm would not become a big mining operation like the Rudisill and St. Catherine's mines in Charlotte. The first shaft dug underground at the Reed Gold Mine was opened in 1831, several years after miners in Charlotte had been pulling gold out of quartz veins in the earth.

In the late-1820s and early-1830s, when miners at the Rudisill were using ore-crushing equipment that processed nearly 3,000 pounds of ore a day, miners at the Reed still relied on primitive methods of surface mining. Heavy machinery wasn't brought to the Reed until the 1850s—well after John Reed's death in 1845.

John Reed had plenty of chances to expand his mining operations. But he was strict: neither his partners nor his sons or sons-in-law were allowed to mine in any areas he cultivated. Apparently,

he wanted to stay a farmer first, and be a miner second. Mining became the second largest occupation in the state after farming. Many farmers complained about the way mining tore up agricultural land, making it impossible for farmers to cultivate fields filled with pits and shafts. Reed decided that his mine produced enough gold without hauling in heavy machinery. However small his mining operation may have seemed to outsiders, it was, for him at least, big enough.

North Carolina produced at least 1.1 million ounces of gold with a value of approximately \$25 million. The gold rush made Charlotte a financial center for the region in the 19th century, and for the country at the close of the twentieth. Charlotte's two biggest banks; Bank of America and First Union, have their roots in gold rush history.

California gold may have eclipsed the gold rush in the Tarheel State, but North Carolina can always claim the bragging rights to the first documented discovery of gold in the United States.

“Boys, We’ve Got It!”

In 1896, the Kelly family leased the rights to mine along Little Meadow Creek to four local residents— Jacob L. Shinn, Jesse Cox, his son A. Mack Cox, and Dr. James Robert Jerome. All four had other occupations and mined in their spare time, like many farmers had even at the height of the gold rush.

On April 9, 1896, the four commenced digging in Dry Hollow which was just above Little Meadow Creek. Later that morning, Jacob Shinn, who was digging at around three and a half feet below the surface, struck something large and heavy. When the rock was brought to the surface, it didn’t look like gold, so it was tossed aside. Finally, Shinn took it down to Little Meadow Creek to wash it off. It was then that Shinn yelled, “Boys, we’ve got it!”

Their initial assumption had been wrong. The rock they’d tossed aside only hours before was a 23-pound gold nugget. The nugget was 11 inches long and 13 1/2 inches in circumference. It contained approximately five pounds of quartz.

The men headed to the nearby town of Georgeville, North Carolina, to weigh the rock and spread the news: the “big one” had been discovered at Reed Gold Mine. On the way, Jesse Cox shouted out their discovery and soon everyone who heard him was talking about the nugget. Soon hundreds of people hoping to see the nugget traveled to Georgeville, which was then a tiny village that sported little more than a store, a post office, a flour and corn mill, sawmill, and cotton gin.

Within days of the discovery, the manager of Reed Gold Mine Dr. Justin Lisle, received telegrams from as far away as Milwaukee, Wisconsin; New York; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; asking if the nugget was for sale. Instead, the men took the nugget to Concord, North Carolina, and to the assay offices in Charlotte, North Carolina, so that it could be on display. Several casts were made, including one for the Smithsonian Institution and one for the North Carolina Museum of History. Finally, the nugget was ground up for its gold. The “Shinn Nugget” was the last large nugget ever found at the Reed. At least, as far as we know!