

## Benjamin Haile's Gold Mine

Haile Gold Mine, which is located about 3.5 miles northeast of the town of Kershaw in Lancaster county, no longer yields economically profitable gold but in its time produced more gold than any mine in the U. S. east of the Mississippi river.

In 1827 Capt. Benjamin Haile heard about gold being discovered in Charlotte, NC and decided to search over his 1,000 acre farm. Near his grist mill on Ledbetter Creek he found sufficient amounts to set up an operation.

There is no evidence that Haile knew anything about how to set up and operate a mill, nor is there a record of how he made contacts with those who had appropriate knowledge. But records do show that in 1837 a Frenchman by the name of Cugnot, built a 5-stamp mill for him. It is also said that it was only the second such mill to be erected in the US. Other equipment was added such as "chilean mills, arrastras, and hand mortars."

When gold was discovered in California in 1849, a large percentage of Haile's workers took off for California. Then the Civil War came along and production virtually stopped. Still, Haile Gold Mine was a major target of Sherman's troops. For Lancaster County court records this was most unfortunate. Knowing Union troops were on their way to Lancaster, the probate judge attempted to have the records under his care (such things as wills and probate papers) moved by wagon to the Haile Gold Mine for storage. The wagons were intercepted and the important court documents were destroyed.

In 1880 E. Gybbon Spilsbury took charge of the mine for a group of New York investors. A 20-stamp mill was built. This worked well for above ground ore but not for below ground level. In 1889 Dr. Adolph Thies developed a new process called the Thies barrel chlorination process which would recover gold from sulfides. Mine experts visited Kershaw from all over the world to witness Thies' invention.

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.

"Capt'n" Ernest Thies, 20, brother of Adolph, and two others were killed in the explosion. 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 loss of equipment in the explosion stopped gold processing until 1934 when the price of gold rose.

According to a US Department of Interior's Bureau of Mines publication in 1940 the mine had produced \$4,500,000 of gold at \$20.67 an ounce from something over a million tons of ore since 1827. Detailed analyses of the value of crude ore in various time periods showed that the value of gold extracted per ton

in the period 1829-77 was \$15 per ton becoming less and less until in 1935-36 the value was \$3.88 per ton.

In 1940 it was reported that old pits (pre-1880) were as much 150 feet in depth with one vertical shaft going down as far as 350 feet. Digging after 1880 extended the largest pit to a vertical depth of 475 feet.

The end of gold mining at Haile Gold Mine came in 1942 when the World War II draft made it impossible to get workers.

There were 23 small gold mines in York county and 14 in Lancaster county that were worked before the Civil War. A few pits survive and a few names such as "Gold Hill Road" in Fort Mill township and Gold Hill A. M. E. Church in Indian Land, Lancaster county, but nothing to equal the Haile Gold Mine

By Louise Pettus