

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Carroll weathered its own gold rush
By Joe Getty

"Thar's gold in them there Carroll County hills."

Citizens in the Manchester vicinity caught the gold rush fever in 1881. Many people knowledgeable about local history are aware of the existence of the Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company based on this reference in J. Thomas Scharf's *History of Western Maryland* published in 1882:

"Many years ago gold was discovered in various places on a ridge extending through Manchester town from Cranberry Valley. In 1879, Messrs. Keepert and Lafeber, of Littlestown, made a thorough examination of the gold region, and found by assays that it was in sufficient quantities to pay for digging. In the summer of 1881 this company was organized with Daniel Beckley as president, and C.J.H. Ganter as secretary. On Aug. 13, 1881, the stockholders at a called meeting voted to purchase the necessary machinery to proceed to work, and the work is being pushed to an apparently successful conclusion. The largest quantities of gold have been found right in the town, or on farms close to the corporation limits. The company has leased several farms, and is actively engaged now in searching for the treasure."

I have frequently been asked about the fate of this company. We can go to the local newspapers of 1881-82 to follow the history of gold exploration in northern Carroll County:

Democratic Advocate, August 20, 1881. "Carroll County Gold. At a meeting of the Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company at Manchester, last Saturday, reports showed that the \$5,000 necessary to commence operations had been subscribed, and a committee was appointed to purchase the necessary machinery for extracting the gold from the quartz. The committee which consisted of Messrs. Christian Royer, Geo. W. Matthews, and Jos. S. Cornman went to Norristown, Pa., on Monday and purchased the machinery. The machinery will be received sometime in October, and the company expects to get to work about the first of November. A three-story building suitable for the purposes of the company, will also have to be erected. It is said that some stones taken from the artesian well now being bored in this city has been tested, and gave a yield of over \$600 per town. The rocks were gotten at a depth of 500 feet."

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Democratic Advocate, Sept. 3, 1881. "Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company held a meeting last Saturday and adopted their revised by-laws, appointed a committee to wait on Messrs. Keyport and LeFevre to close the contract with them as mineralogists for the company, and appointed Messrs. Reese, Hoffacker, and Cornman to select a site to locate the machinery."

Democratic Advocate, Sept. 17, 1881. "The Board of Managers of the Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company have decided to erect their building and machinery on Christian Royer's farm in Cranberry Valley. The building will be 24 x 40 feet, and 16 feet to the square; only one story instead of three stories as at first proposed. A building of these dimensions, with the machinery arranged as proposed by the building committee, will afford ample room and the machinery can be operated as well as in a higher building. The building committee are Christian Royer, David H. Hoffacker, and Geo. W. Matthews. It is expected that the company will be at work in a few weeks."

Democratic Advocate, Nov. 19, 1881. "The Gold and Silver Mining Company have received all of the machinery and the mechanics are engaged in putting it up. The secretary thinks that all arrangements will be perfected the latter part of this week, and operations will shortly be commenced."

Democratic Advocate, Jan. 7, 1882. "Dr. Forster, of Norristown, Pa., inventory and manufacturer of part of Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company's machinery, arrived in town on Tuesday evening of last week, and on Wednesday inspected the company's works and found it necessary to raise part of the building 12 feet higher and make a slight change in the arrangement of some of the machinery. He left for his home on Thursday, but will return again and put the works in operation as soon as the required changes are made, which will be done as soon as the weather will permit. The managers have reopened the books for the sale of 400 shares of stock. For 15 days the privilege of purchase will be limited to stock holders, and if the entire amount be not disposed of in that time, the privilege will be opened to the public. Their object is to increase their cash capital to enable them to purchase additional machinery, indispensable in successfully operating their works."

There is a four-month gap in newspaper reports about the company. The Joseph Cornman cited in the articles above was the editor of the newly-formed Manchester newspaper. Thus the *Democratic Advocate* could not resist the urge to gloat in the following article:

Democratic Advocate, May 13, 1882. "Collapse of the Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company. The ADVOCATE has always had misgivings concerning the success of the Parr

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Ridge Gold and Silver Mining company. It never believed that gold existed in paying quantities in that section – certainly never believed that the outcome would rival the gold of California in quality and quantity, as the Manchester paper exultingly proclaimed. That part we were satisfied was a bubble that would soon burst. We had no desire, however, to throw obstacles in the way of testing the oars, and would have rejoiced if the experiment had demonstrated that it would have been moderately remunerative to work them. Consequently the ADVOCATE has said but little on the subject – only chronicled facts as they transpired. Some of the gold dust has been assayed at the Philadelphia mint, and the report showed that it would be unprofitable to work the ores. After receiving the report, the board of managers met and passed the following resolutions:

'Resolved, by the Board of Managers of this Company that ample tests have been made by the Company's works to convince us that the best interests of all concerned require the immediate sale of the company's property and the winding up of its affairs.

Resolved, that the President of the Company be authorized and requested to take such action as will carry out the above resolution.

Resolved, that a meeting of the stockholders be called for May 13, at 1 p.m. at the Company's office for the purpose of acting upon the above resolutions.'

"Thus the enterprise has collapsed. What amount has been lost cannot be told until the affairs are closed up."

Democratic Advocate, June 10, 1882. "A meeting of the stockholders of the Parr's Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company was held at the company's office, this place, last Saturday. The meeting was slimly attended and the election of the board of managers which was announced to take place on that day was postponed until the 21st proximo. A committee was appointed to examine the secretary's and treasurer's books, and the treasurer was authorized to select a collector to collect all money due the company on account of unpaid stock."

Democratic Advocate, July 29, 1882. "Non-Suited. The Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company some weeks ago resolved to close up its affairs and dissolve. A number of subscribers to the capital stock being in arrears, suit was brought to recover. Some 72 suits were instituted before Justice J. P. Baltozer, at Manchester, and on Thursday of last week that against George Bixler was tried as a test case. Smith and McKellip appeared for the Company and Honorable Chas. B. Roberts for the stockholders. The Company was non-suited on the following grounds – first, there had been no legal assessments; second, no legal notice of assessments had been given; third, assessments had been made before full amount of stock had been taken contrary to the act

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of 1868. The capital stock is \$10, of which only \$5,320 had been taken. The indebtedness of the company is \$1,700 and available assets is \$1,200."

The failure of the company had been presaged by the *Democratic Advocate* when it ran this national news item from the *New York Herald* on the same day (Aug. 20, 1881) that it announced the formation of the Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company: "Ten gold mines per day are being discovered in New York state at present, and the *Herald*, estimating that each gold mine is calculated to ruin 100 people, figures out, if this rate of discovery is kept up, it will only require three years to bankrupt all the people of the state."

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: John T. Gross owned capital stock in the Parr Ridge Gold and Silver Mining Company as shown by this 1881 certificate.