

An unlikely place for prospecting

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If one were to look for iron or gold ore, he would probably not select Chelmsford as a likely place in which to prospect. However, in the early days iron was found here of quality suitable for processing. As for gold, that's another story.

Limonite, or bog iron, was found as a deposit in meadows and swamps, particularly along the Stony Brook valley in North Chelmsford. It is thought that the entire valley was once filled with a lake from which the iron had settled.

The records show that "At a Gen'll Town meeting, March the 4th, 1706-7, Jonathan Richardson and John Richardson had granted the Liberty of erecting Iron works upon Stony brook with the conveniency of flowing provided it Damnfies none of the inhabitants."

Later, William Adams, who owned much of the land of the Newfield section of Chelmsford (Newfield was the early name for North Chelmsford) brought these iron deposits to the attention of General Sheperd Leach, who was then operating an iron and foundry business elsewhere. In 1824, General Leach erected a blast furnace in what is now the mill yard between Princeton and Middlesex Streets. It was reported in 1835 that there was "inexhaustible supple of bog ore on the farm of Robert Richardson."

The iron produced from this ore was mainly suitable for heavy castings and was used in the manufacture of large gears for the cotton mills that were being built in Lowell.

Gold in Chelmsford? Under the heading,

The way It was

By George A.
Parkhurst



"Auriferous Discovery on Robin's Hill — A Stock Company to be Organized," appeared the following story in the Lowell Weekly Journal of July 1, 1887:

"Not those attractive mint drops which Uncle Sam turns out from his Philadelphia establishment, although occasionally one does find its way within her borders, but by the above caption is meant the virgin ore which, it is asserted by experts after careful and repeated tests, is to be found in paying quantities upon the southern slope of Robin's hill.

"About three months ago an experienced prospector paid his first visit to the premises of W. S. Simons, proprietor of the Summit house and took away for assay several barrels of earth which to his practiced eye strongly indicated the presence of mineral deposits. The application of rigid tests proved that his theory was correct and it has been further fortified by subsequent experiments.

"The result of the assay showed the presence in very satisfactory quantities of gold, tin and copper. For example a trial of the surface wash of the hill taken at random showed that for an outlay of 75 cents for ex-

pense of washing, the value of gold deposit was \$1.25. The belief of the prospector is that the gold yield of the rock will be \$200 a ton, and by the chemical process of extraction which he controls, dispensing entirely with the old method of smelting and its attendant expense, 2 tons a day can be utilized, which would produce a yield of \$400.

"Boston capitalists have become interested in the matter and have so great confidence in the value of the deposit (and the method of extracting the precious metal), the measures have already been taken to secure a lease of a part of the hill from Mr. Simons, and within two weeks it is intended to organize a stock company and break ground at once.

"Old residents in the vicinity have long known of the presence of copper, asbestos, & c., traces of which have frequently been found in the old limestone quarries which were worked 50 or more years ago, but none supposed until recently that gold could be obtained from the old hill except by that process of hard labor which transmutes the agricultural products of the soil into hard cash. Whether this latest discovery will prove more remunerative will soon be known."

It is not known what came of this seemingly momentous discovery as the newspaper makes no further mention of it during the next several months.

And that's the way it was...

George A. Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.