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A History of Gold Mining in the Town of Livermore, Maine

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A
HISTORY OF GOLD MINING IN THE TOWN

of
LIVERMORE, MAINE

By
Adm
A. HAMILTON BOOTHBY



As partial fulfillment of the requirements of
Ed 51 - History of Education in Maine

FOREWORD

In this history of gold mining in Livermore I have tried to bring forth in some semblance of unity and clearness, facts which I think will be of interest to both the people of Livermore and students of Maine's geology and natural resources.

To my knowledge no person has as yet attempted to record the complete history of the ventures of the Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company. The story lives only in the realm of legend of the people of Livermore, and it was with the idea of securing the perpetuation of this legend that I have written the story down.

I have made no attempt in this history to be technical, for I feel that the public will welcome a "fire-side" story more than a technical treatise.

In order to collect my material I have been most fortunate in being able to interview persons who were associated with the enterprise itself. I want to extend my thanks to the following persons who helped furnish historical material: Martin L. Keith, Mrs. Media Johnson, Mrs. Roland Hammond, and Mr. Roland Hammond. Without the aid of these persons my efforts would have been in vain. It was thru the encouragement, inspiration, and advice of Miss Ava Harriet Chadbourne of the Education Department of the University of Maine that I was prompted to write this history. To her I add my sincerest thanks.

A. H. Boothby

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Proof Reader: Cecil Gilbert

Technical Draftsman: L. Maynard Keller

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Maine as a mining state. The State of Maine is rich with minerals of various kinds. Among the long list of such deposits are found granite, lime, marble, slate, clay, iron, lead, copper, tin, gold, feldspar, mica, molybdenite, tourmalines, and other gems. All of these exist over and above the small amounts of the precious metals such as gold, silver, and platinum.

Occurrence of the precious metals. The extent of gold and silver deposits in Maine is extremely limited. These metals have been discovered in several places, namely, the Sandy River, parts of Aroostook County, and Livermore in Androscoggin County. Gold has been found to exist both in the free state and as an ore. The gold of the Sandy River is free gold, and it is believed that there is a rich lode of the yellow metal somewhere in the mountains at the head waters of the Sandy. It is a question whether or not it will ever be discovered. In Livermore, however, the gold is found in the ore form combined with both silver and platinum.

Importance as an industry. It is doubtful whether there is enough gold in the state to ever warrant its development as an industry, comparable to the other mining businesses of the state. Estimates and surveys have been made, and the following is a report of the State on the matter: "Notwithstanding the fact that Maine has within its borders almost every known mineral and precious stone, yet her mineral wealth consists mainly in her inexhaustible quarries of the finest granite, slate, and lime in the world; in her abundance of clay of excellent quality; in her feldspar, mica and quartz, and in her unsurpassed mineral and medicinal waters, rather than in mines of the precious metals".¹

1. Public Documents of Maine, 1904.

Gold in Livermore. As has been stated previously, gold occurs in Livermore in quantities which have as yet been undetermined. The main theme of this history centers around the discovery of gold and the development of it in Livermore. There also occurs silver and mere traces of platinum in the ore with the gold.

CHAPTER II

MINING IN LIVERMORE AT THE PRESENT TIME

If one were to visit the town of Livermore now, in the year 1934, and were to question one of the populace about the "gold mine" the result would in all probability be negative. There is no gold mine there now in operation. The "gold mine" is past and forgotten by all except those who perhaps lost their savings in the venture.

The scene where once was feverish activity and excitement, where persons were drunk with expected wealth, now presents an aspect of dullness and neglect. The mine is located on the farm now owned by Robert H. Boothby and Sons who bought the property from the Keith heirs some eight or nine years ago.

On the South side of the road which connects Bretton's Mills with Strickland's Ferry, and on the old Keith farm, there is a swamp full of springs and muck pits. In the midst of this swamp there will be found a slight elevation in the terrain, and it is on this small hill where the vein of gold crops out. The same vein of ore comes to the surface on the summit of a hill about one mile north. It is on this hill that the first Keith built his homestead.

Early discovery. In order to make clear the story of the discovery of this vein of gold on the old Keith farm it is necessary to say a few words about the Keith family. The Keiths were among the early settlers of the town. The brick house on the Keith farm was built some one hundred years ago.¹

When the discovery of gold in California came about, one of the

1. Monroe, Ira T., History of Livermore and Its Pioneers, Lewiston, 1928

early Keiths set out for the west to seek his fortune. After a number of years he returned to the old homestead. His interest had been directed toward geology while in the west, and he did some prospecting around Livermore, as a mere hobby. While on a hike he came across the above mentioned swamp and hill. Noticing the bare ledge outcropping at that point he began to study the rock strata. He took a few samples and returned home. After studying the samples he told Martin Keith that if he had found those samples in the west he would be fairly certain that they contained gold. Martin Keith, who told me this part of the story, was a young man at the time and was intensely interested in geology so much so that it later became his life's work. This statement coming from one who understood geology very well for one who had no technical training, aroused the interest of the young Martin, and he set about to determine if gold was really present or not.

At this time Martin Keith's father, Marquis L. Keith, took an interest in the discovery, and he and his son took several samples of ore from the surface of the vein. They sent these samples to Professor Robinson at Bowdoin College. I was unable to find the correct date that these samples were sent to Professor Robinson, but it must have been around the year 1890 or 1891. Neither could I find exactly what the returns from this assay were except that Professor Robinson gave the Keiths a great deal of encouragement and proposed that they start excavations to see if the vein of ore continued to assay well at the lower depths.

Later developments. Acting upon the advice of Professor Robinson, the Keiths started operations on a small scale. They commenced excavating the solid rock. The work was done almost wholly by members of the Keith family at first. They had to carry on their farming opera-

tions, but when they had time and money to spare they hired a few men, bought explosives and drills and continued to excavate. This first pit that was dug is called shaft number one. It was about ten feet square and was sunk to a depth of approximately twenty feet before it was abandoned. Samples of the ore taken from shaft number one at the surface in the year 1891 were assayed and showed a content of \$9 per ton.

Further digging revealed a seam in the solid rock on the east side of the shaft. This vein was about 6 or 8 inches in width, and had the appearance of being a fissure filled with "putty gouge".

Samples of this putty gouge were taken by entirely disinterested persons, and the returns from these assays show remarkable increases in the value of the ore. One assay ran as high as \$84, and another \$96, and still another \$105 per ton of rock.

In the year 1892 a sample of ore was taken from shaft No. 1 in a general way. The sample was sent to the refining and smelting works of L. B. Darling in Providence, R. I. who writes back as follows:

Providence, R. I.

Feb. 4, 1892

Statement:

Ore presented by M. L. Keith, Auburn, Maine

Description: Quartzite with iron pyrites, intermingled with silver sulphurets; gold, per ton - 2000 lbs. -

\$18.54; silver per ton - 2000 lbs. - 10 oz. \$9.00

Total - per ton - \$27.54

The ore seems to run quite well and would bear further proof, as at the above figures it could be made to pay if worked in a large way.

Respectfully,

J. B. Darling

Beginning of Shaft Number 2. I can find no record of assays being made from the year 1892 until the year 1896. It was in 1896 that an assay was made of shaft number 2.

It seems that the Keiths discovered the direction in which the fissure of putty gouge ran by the time they had sunk shaft number 1 to the depth of about 20 feet. At this time this shaft was abandoned, and shaft number two was started. Here they found some depth of drift or earth atop the gold bearing rock. The total vein of rock or ledge was about 100 feet in width, and after excavating a few feet of earth the rock ledge was reached. Here they discovered the fissure again.

Samples of ore were taken at this depth of about 10 feet into the drift or top soil. These samples came from the putty gouge in the fissure on top of the ledge, and were sent to Providence, R. I. - probably to Darling as before. The results of these samples were as follows:

Sample No. 1 - gold and silver - \$27.10

Sample No. 2 - gold and silver - \$23.95

Sample No. 3 - gold and silver - \$26.13

Period of inactivity. From the last mentioned assay made in the year 1896 I can discover no written evidence of operations being carried on. Martin L. Keith told me in an interview I had with him that some work was done, but that the Keiths were seriously handicapped by lack of capital. From 1896 until 1903 the Keiths succeeded in interesting certain parties in Livermore and surrounding towns. Martin L. Keith was especially anxious to carry on more extensive operations, and toward this end he finally succeeded in organizing the Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company.

Note: The assays are based on 1 ton - 2000 lbs. of ore.
Date of assay - November 24, 1896

CHAPTER III

INCORPORATION OF ANDROSCOGGIN MINING AND MILLING COMPANY

In February, 1903 the Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company was incorporated under the laws of the state, and was given a charter.

The following record of this action is found in the Public Documents of Maine: "Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company was incorporated under General Law in 1903. Certificate was filed with the Secretary of State January 31, 1903".¹

The company was thus organized and the following officers were elected:

- J. L. Cummings, Jr. - President
- John H. Maxwell, Esq. - Secretary and Treasurer
- John L. Cummings, Jr.)
- John Maxwell, Esquire)
- Marquis L. Keith) Board of Directors
- Alden Pike)
- Martin L. Keith²)

The company was incorporated with capital stock of \$750,000. Stock was sold to interested persons, and quite extensive advertising was carried on. Small pamphlets were printed to assist in this advertising. These copies of The Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company were distributed at large and resulted in the sale of large quantities of stock to persons wishing to risk small amounts in the venture.

In the following table exists a record of the capital stock and state taxes during 1903, 1904, 1905, 1906, 1907. These figures were compiled from the State Assessor's Reports in the Public Documents of Maine for the above years.

1. Public Documents of Maine, 1904 - Part 2.

2. Lewiston Evening Journal, Friday, October 2, 1903

Year	Capital Stock	Tax
1903	\$750,000	\$50.00
1904	750,000	50.00
1905	750,000	50.00
1906	750,000	50.00
1907	750,000	50.00

Operations Under the Corporation. Now that the enterprise had become crystallized into a business-like form with capital to work with, operations were rushed forward as fast as possible. Machinery was purchased to speed up the work, and men were hired outside the Keith family. Among the machines purchased were a steam boiler equipped with steam engine to operate a winch and a drum on which the bucket cables operated, a double action steam ^{pumps} pump to keep the shaft dry, and numerous other tools and accessories. The steam windlass replaced the old hand windlass, but the old bucket was still used. This bucket was merely a large hoghead with about one third of the top removed. It was bound with heavy forged iron hoops and had a large iron bail to which the cable was attached.

The donkey engine and the steam pump are still at the mine where they were left when the project was abandoned. When Robert H. Boothby and Sons purchased the Keith homestead the bucket and windlass were found packed away in the barn.

With these new machines the work progressed rapidly. Shaft number 2 was extended down into solid rock. The shaft was about ten feet square, the earth on top being held back by logs cob-housed to form a square box.

The mine at this period must have been a scene of great activity.

An article in a current newspaper records the visit of one of its reporters to the scene as follows:

"After a short walk thru a fine field we struck a path leading into a thick growth of sapling pines, and in about 100 yards came to a building used as a storehouse, blacksmith shop, and also fitted up with a furnace with a supply of crucibles and retorts for the purpose of testing the ore".¹

I have been unable to find much material concerning the number of men employed. This probably varied from time to time. The Lewiston Evening Journal states that in the fall of 1903 there were four men employed outside the Keith family and were in the charge of Mr. Perley Leavitt.²

To give a summary of the resumption of activity of the project I am submitting the following quotation, "The gold-bearing vein has been prospected in a desultory way for some years, but not until this year, through the energy ofMartin L. Keith, has an attempt been made to prospect on a large scale or in anything approaching a scientific way".³

Shaft Number 2 was sunk to a depth of about 45 or 50 feet. At this depth a horizontal tunnel was excavated about 30 feet east. It was found that the vein of gold-bearing rock increased in width at the lower levels and showed promise of opening into the mother-lode although it was never reached as will be seen later.

Numerous assays were made at regular intervals during the progress of the shaft.

1. Lewiston Evening Journal, Friday, October 2, 1903.

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

Assay at 35' level. Samples were taken from the 35 foot level and were assayed by L. B. Darling of Providence, R. I. who writes Martin L. Keith as follows:

Providence, R. I.

August 4, 1903

Report upon samples of ore from Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company.

Description: Quartzite with arsenical iron; gold, per ton, $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. - \$30.90; silver, per ton, $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. \$.81. Total - \$31.71

L. B. Darling

Assay at 45' level. The last regulation survey made by the company at the 45 foot level includes an assay by George M. Baker. The following is a copy of the correspondence of Mr. Baker to Mr. Keith:

Providence, R. I.

Sept. 10, 1903

Report on ore from Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company.

Description: Traces of the rare and valuable ore of platinum; gold, 2 oz. 6 dwts. - \$47.58; silver 1 oz. 19 dwts. - \$1.21
Total - \$48.59

George M. Baker

Cessation of Activities. Now we come to the end of the story.

It is a rather sad ending indeed. It is shrouded with obscurity, so that I have not succeeded in discovering just what happened to the Androscoggin Mining and Milling Company.

After the year 1907 I can find no account of it in the Public Documents. They paid no state tax on capital stock from that year on.

Consequently we may guess with reasonable safety that the dissolution of the corporation occurred at about that time.

The corporation had expended its funds by this time, and they unable to float any loans. They had received nothing through the sale of ore. The Keith family could not finance the venture, so it was abandoned.

Problems facing the project. The company faced a severe problem. All its money had been spent with no return. In order to make any return possible it was necessary to handle ore in large quantities. A great expenditure for smelters, stamping mills, and other expensive machinery was necessary to handle the ore. The only alternative was to mine the ore and ship it to a smelter elsewhere. This was virtually impossible because the only means of transportation at that time was the railroad, and a river with no bridge separated the mine from the railroad (See map on page 15) The only ^{possible} result occurred - abandonment.

Furthermore, the people of the State had little confidence in the scheme because Maine has never been noted for gold mining. Martin Keith told me that if the project had been in California instead of Maine, he believed there would have been no trouble floating loans to expand the business and place it on a solid foundation.

Conclusion. Although the first venture of the town of Livermore in gold mining was a failure it proved several things. (1) That gold does exist as well as silver and some platinum. (2) That the prospects of a paying proposition are good if capital could be raised to provide the necessary equipment.

Martin Keith now has interests in the various mining businesses of Maine, but he still maintains that the venture was sound and that sometime it will be developed.

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