

FARMER MINED GOLD FROM MUDDY PACOLET RIVER

Gold in the Pacolet River!

That's what Darell Anderson of Memphis, Tenn., says.

He says, "My Great grand-father Everett Clark was born and raised near Pacolet. He told this story of finding gold many times before his death. My grandfather, Thomas Smith, the historian of the family, wrote the story down so it could be passed along to future generations".

Anderson's story goes like this:

Everett Clark was a farmer who hunted to add meat to the family's meager supply of food.

When the Civil War began, he joined and fought in many battles in Northern Virginia. That's where he learned about gold mining.

One of the men in his regiment had mined gold in North Carolina before the war. Clark was interested in hearing about gold and the two soldiers talked a lot about it.

One day while on a wood cutting detail in western North Carolina his friend showed him some specks of

gold dust in a spring. Clark got gold fever that day and he never lost it.

After the war he came back to Pacolet. Times were hard. His small farm couldn't produce enough food and most of the game was gone. Hunting for meat was about as bad as farming.

One cold winter day he was out hunting without having any luck when late in the afternoon he saw two wood ducks floating along the opposite bank of the Pacolet River. His aim was good that day and he shot one of the ducks. The other flew away. The dead wood duck floated down the river.

Not to be out-done by a duck, Clark stripped off his clothes and went into the icy water after his kill. Before he reached the duck the current became strong and he was swept down the river.

When he reached the shore he was about half a mile down stream without clothing or duck and the weather was bitter cold. He began the long trip back up the river to find his clothes.

After he rounded a bend in the river, close to where he left his clothes, he heard someone talking. It sounded like a woman and a man. He soon saw them not far away from the river with their wagon stuck in the soft woods dirt. The wagon was filled with wood and the man was trying to get the mule to pull harder.

Clark didn't know what to do, but he was sure he wasn't going to let them see him naked. He hid in a brush pile next to the river. As he sat there waiting for the couple to leave, he looked down at the water's edge. There in the mud was something glittering. He picked it up. To his surprise it was gold — tiny flakes of gold. His friend in the war had told him it was a form of gold called gold dust. Somewhere close by there should be gold nuggets or a gold vein. Clark made a mental note of the area. He planned to return the next day.

The couple with the wagon finally left after unloading the wood so the mule could pull the rig free.

Clark found his clothes, but by now he was almost frozen. By the time he walked the three or four miles home he was feeling bad. That

night he became deathly ill. It was months before he was able to get around again.

After he regained his health, Clark and his two sons went back to the place on the river where the gold dust was found. They panned along the river off and on for weeks without any luck. They found gold dust but not enough to pay for their time to recover it. Clark decided the dust was washing onto the river bank from somewhere in the river. Each time there was a hard rain the dust would appear but nothing had been found in the ground along the river.

One day his eldest son, Mark, swam out into the river, dove to the bottom and grabbed a handful of mud and stones. He swam back to the river bank. When the mud was washed away he found a small gold nugget. Each time he dove in the river after that he found more nuggets. Most of the nuggets were small, but it was more profitable than gold dust.

The family decided they would keep the secret as long as they could. Weeks went by and each day the boys dove in the river. When Clark thought they had enough gold to sell he made a trip to Charlotte and sold it. Things got better on the farm with the extra income from the gold. His two sons worked at the river almost every day while Clark continued to work the farm.

In 1898, the father passed away. The two sons stayed on the farm and continued to dig gold from the river. They always deposited their money in a bank in Charlotte after a sale as Great grand-father did. No one except the immediate family knew they found gold in the river.

In June, 1903, after days of heavy rain, the Pacolet River flooded. Everything in the river's path was washed away. Many lives were lost that night. The water rose so fast people were trapped in their houses. Textile mills along the river banks crumbled and fell into the rushing water. Houses floated away like leaves in a brook.

After the water receded and things got back to near normal the two sons returned to the river. They were prepared to dig away the mud they felt had washed into the hole where the gold was. When they reached the bank of the river they noticed a large cliff that stood across the river was gone. The river had cut away a new path. The two men were not even sure they were in the right area. Although they had worked in the river for years, everything looked different.

For weeks they dug in the river. The gold dust that once washed up on the river bank had disappeared. When the two men were sure they couldn't find the gold again, they moved to Charlotte.

"Many times I've heard my grandfather tell about the gold the family found in the Pacolet River," says Anderson. "He would always say, 'Mother nature must have figured we had dug enough from the river, because she hid it from us that rainy night in 1903.'"

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