

MINERS

The Mother Lode

The spring of 1859 two Irishmen, Patrick McLaughlin and Peter O'Riley, arrived on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada mountain range and began prospecting. It was not long before they hit pay dirt.

Within a few days a former mountain man named Henry Comstock arrived and claimed, "This belongs to me. Way last fall I staked out 160 acres. I own the land, own the water rights. You ain't diggin' no more unless you take me and my friend, Emanuel Penrod, in as partners."

The Irishmen agreed and the four men dug into the bluish sand and washed it in a sluice box. They were taking out hundreds of dollars worth of gold every day and before long were joined by James Fennimore, known as Virginy because of his native state.

These five men were credited as the discoverers of the Comstock Lode, recognized as the greatest single mineral strike in history. Nearly one-half billion dollars worth of gold and silver were mined here. But the discoverers profited very little from their fabulous find.

It was reported that Virginy disposed of his holdings for "an old horse, a pair of blankets and a bottle of whiskey" but he probably held out for more because he always had whiskey money for the rest of his days. He died drunk, falling off a horse and fracturing his skull.

Emanuel Penrod sold his claim for \$8,000 and faded into obscurity. Henry T.P. Comstock sold his interest for \$11,000, invested the money in a supply store and was broke within a few months. He wandered around the growing settlement proclaiming, "I still own the mother lode. I own this here town. It ought to be named after me." Eventually he drifted away and in 1870 he shot himself and was buried without a headstone in Bozeman, Montana.

One of the Irishmen, Patrick McLaughlin, sold his claim for a mere \$3,500 and after the money was spent he cooked in a Virginia City eating establishment and died a pauper. The other Irishman, Peter O'Riley, held out and was rewarded with \$45,000 for his claim. But he did not live to enjoy it. Within a few days of receiving the windfall he began hearing voices and was sent to a private hospital for the insane. The strange voices haunted him until the day he died.

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Last Wish

Ed Schieffelin was five years old when his father departed Pennsylvania for the gold fields of California. He was ten years old when his father sent word for his family to join him on the Rogue River in Oregon.

"On arriving in Oregon," wrote Ed, "the first thing I did was to get a shovel and milk pan and go down to the bank of the river looking for gold."

At the age of 14, hearing the news of a rich strike on the Salmon River of Idaho, Ed ran away from home. He was apprehended 60 miles away and returned home. At the age of 17 he began his career as a prospector and his travels took him south to California and on to Nevada, Utah, Colorado and finally to Arizona where the Apache Indians were on the warpath. For protection Ed fell in with a company of soldiers but would make prospecting sorties, lasting a few days, on his own.

When Ed finally discovered an incredibly rich silver ledge he named it Tombstone because one of the soldiers had told him, "If you keep looking, what you are likely to find is your tombstone."

At the age of 32 Ed was suddenly wealthy beyond comprehension. He bought a house in Los Angeles and tried to live the good life, but he was born to prospect. In 1882 he chartered a schooner and spent the summer looking for gold on the Yukon River of Alaska. He found no gold and returned to California and married a society woman. But she could not settle him down and Ed returned to southern Oregon as an ordinary prospector.

The first week of May, 1897 he wrote a letter stating, "I have found stuff here that will make Tombstone look like salt. This is GOLD!"

Ten days later Ed was found dead beside a mortar and pestle where he had been grinding ore. The ore assayed \$2,000 a ton. The source was never located.

Ed was buried in compliance with an unusual provision he had written in his will: "It is my wish to be buried in the garb of a prospector, my old pick and canteen with me, on top of the granite hills about three miles westerly from the city of Tombstone, Arizona and a monument such as prospectors build when locating a mining claim be built over my grave."

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