

# Gold Mining In Charlotte

Gold mining played a pivotal role in the early development of Charlotte. For the first 50 years of gold mining in the U.S., North Carolina was the nation's leading gold-producing state.

It started one Sunday morning in 1799 at the Cabarrus County farm of John Reed, about 25 miles east of Charlotte. While fishing in a stream on the farm, John's 12-year-old son, Conrad, found a large yellowish rock. Young Conrad took the rock home and for three years his family used it as a doorstep. John, suspecting the rock contained gold but unaware of its true value, sold it to a jeweler for \$3.50. The 17-pound doorstep proved to be a gold nugget, the first documented discovery of gold in the United States.

John Reed returned to his land and uncovered more gold, including a nugget said to weigh 28 pounds. In time he established a mine, which is preserved today as a state historic site.

At the height of the Carolina gold mining era as many as 118 mines and prospects were listed in Mecklenburg County. Two mines of commercial significance, Rudisill and St. Catherine, were located near what is now Uptown Charlotte, and it is believed that tunnels from the two mines still lie beneath much of the area just south and west of Uptown.

The Rudisill Mine, at one time possibly the largest in North Carolina, operated at various periods from 1827 to 1938. It had numerous shafts in a line roughly parallel to South Mint Street. A principal shaft was located near the present-day intersection of South Mint and Summit Avenue.

The St. Catherine Mine, the oldest in Mecklenburg County, was centered in an area near West Morehead and Cedar Streets, not far from Bank of America Stadium.

Today there is no easily recognizable evidence of either mine at the earth's surface. Some of the shafts have been capped; others have been filled with debris. Some shafts and adits (horizontal shafts into a hillside) have been obliterated through the construction of highways and buildings.



A half eagle gold coin, produced at the Charlotte Mint. Note the letter "C" above the date. Photo courtesy of the Mint Museum of Art.

However, Charlotte still enjoys another legacy from the gold mining era. In 1835 President Andrew Jackson signed legislation to establish a branch of the United States Mint in Charlotte to press the local gold into coins. A building was erected on West Trade Street (the site of the present federal courthouse). In March 1838 the first coin was struck—a half eagle, with a face value of five dollars. Later, the mint produced quarter eagles, worth \$2.50, as well as one-dollar gold coins.

The mint closed after the Civil War began, and never resumed operations. In 1932, when the government announced plans to demolish the

building, the Charlotte Woman's Club launched a campaign to save it. The structure was disassembled and rebuilt at its present location in Charlotte's Eastover neighborhood. On October 22, 1936, it was formally dedicated as North Carolina's first art museum, the Mint Museum of Art.

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Sources: "A Historical and Engineering Report on the Rudisill Gold Mine," Charlotte Public Works Department/Engineering Division, August 1976; "Recommendations for Action to Commemorate the Role of Gold Mining in the Growth and Development of Charlotte..." by Dr. Henry Brown and Henry M. Singletary, Geological Resources, Inc.; the Mint Museum of Art, and documents in the Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.