

Digging Up the Past on Gold Mine Road

If you've traveled Mt. Phillip or South Clifton Roads off Route 40-A and noticed Gold Mine Road, perhaps you've wondered about the origin of its name. Is this just another random road name or was there ever an actual gold mine nearby?

In the early 1930s, the prospect of gold was revealed in the area called Clifton near Braddock Heights. In the context of the Great Depression, this endeavor now seems fashioned more out of hope of striking it rich than practicality.

When commercial operations began in 1939, *The Frederick Post* commented that the "mine has developed into what appears a worthwhile venture for the hardy pioneers who took a chance."

The operation was engineered by Harry L. Baumgardner and began in January when the company brought in the support of Robert Cartwright, a Los Angeles engineer who, according to a *Post* article dated May 27, 1939, claimed there was a lot of gold to be found in the hills near Clifton.

Cartwright told *The Post* that he had worked on mines that allotted as little as \$14 a ton. According to *The Post*, the Clifton mine was "assaying about three ounces per ton," which amounted to about \$108 in gold. Cartwright expressed no doubts about finding gold and profits.

All seemed well initially for the mining company, but a year later it was in deep debt. The company was forced to sell its equipment at public auction, though Cartwright had been desperately trying to find investors up until the auction day. *The Post* reported that on Sept. 26, 1940, the only shareholder from the company present at the auction was Baumgardner, who "assisted with the sales and did not participate in the auction."

The Gold Mine Road name already existed when the county first commissioned roads. According to the county's planning and zoning department, Gold Mine Road (Road No. 205) was one of the original 500 roads adopted by the county in the 1950s. One might assume the road was an offspring of the gold mine, but the opposite is true. The road existed as a path between Mt. Phillip and Clifton Roads, and the name was added later. The houses that now exist were built beginning in the 1960s and the road was paved about 15 to 20 years ago.

Except for the name and some obscured remains, it would be easy to forget that Frederick County had a gold mine. Montgomery County proved to be more successful in terms of actually mining gold. In the 1800s, mining operations took place near Great Falls. Today, Montgomery County's Gold Mine Road bustles with traffic and is home to an elementary school. ✦

Matt Satterfield was a feature-writing student of Al Weinberg at Hood College. Weinberg supervised the research and writing of this article.

