

# Harald Seiz: America's First Gold Rush

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## *Accidental Discovery*

STUTTGART, BADEN WÜRTTEMBERG, DEUTSCHLAND, August 12, 2016 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Half](#) a century before the discovery of [gold](#) in California that sent thousands of Americans out west in search of fortune, a young boy from North Carolina playing at a creek unearthed a shiny rock that kicked off America's first gold rush. In 1799, Conrad Reed found a 17-pound gold nugget on the banks of a creek on his family's land. Not knowing this rock to be gold, the Reeds used it as a doorstep for 3 years. They were a farming family, how were they to know what gold looks like? However, Conrad's father John soon wised up and took it to a jeweler in Fayetteville who confirmed it was gold and swindled it from him for a mere \$3.50.

Realizing he was duped, the elder Reed sought a reversal of fortune by forming a partnership to set up a mining team at the site where his son found the nugget. Using picks and shovels, the barebones operation attempted to dig up more gold. This eventually branched out along the banks and sandbars of nearby rivers and streams.

### The Rush Begins

Within 20 years, word spread quickly and the rush for gold in North Carolina was a booming business. In 1823, the state appointed Denison Olmsted, a faculty member at the University of North Carolina, as the first state geologist. They commissioned him to map out the state's gold and other valuable mineral deposits.

In 1825, Mattias Barringer, a German who owned a farm about 20 miles from the Reed farm, followed a vein of surface gold down to its core. His company, The Barringer Gold Mining Company, was the first to set up a deep mine. This way of mining is considerably more complex than surface mining and requires more sophisticated skills and equipment. Despite that, dozens of companies took up the challenge and set up their own mines before long.

As more and more discoveries were made, the excitement surrounding the Carolina Gold Rush was reaching its boiling point. Experienced miners and engineers from all around the world set up shop in Carolina, increasing production tenfold. By 1832, there were more than fifty fully operational mines, employing more than 25,000 people. Only behind farming, more people were employed in gold mining than any other business.

### Problems Arise

However, not everything for the miners and prospectors was golden sunshine and smooth sailing. The owners of all the gold didn't have a reliable market to sell it to. Gold coins from the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia were seldom found in the South. At that turbulent time in American history, there was no set form of federal currency as the states mostly relied on their own banks to issue paper notes that were inadequately backed with real assets. Also, English and Spanish coins with varying values were still in circulation in the early 19th century. On top of all that, bartering was still a common practice during this time. All these issues forced a lot of the gold to be shipped to Europe through Charleston, being that this was a more reliable option than sending it to Philadelphia.

A U.S. Representative familiar with these issues, Samuel Price Carson, tried several times to pass a bill to establish a U.S. mint in the mining zones of the Carolinas. He argued that the dangers and inconvenience of transporting the gold from North Carolina to the only U.S. Mint in Philadelphia were reason enough to secure a U.S. Mint. Although shot down several times, in 1835 Congress approved construction of three new branches of the U.S. Mint across the South. The Charlotte Mint opened in 1837 and began minting coins one year later.

Lastly, In 1837, English geologist George Featherstonhaugh visited many gold-mining operations in

North Carolina. He lamented the destruction of the land due to surface mining, and noted that in this quest for gold, the miners were destroying any potential use of the land for agriculture. Once gold was discovered in California in 1849, the fervor of the Carolina Gold Rush died down. However, the Carolinas still lead the south in terms of gold production and it is still a thriving [industry](#) today.

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