

# Faurquier County Gold Mine - The LeRoy Connection

by Lynne Belluscio

We were traveling our way back from a museum conference in Colonial Williamsburg on Route 17 through Virginia, trying to avoid the traffic around Washington, when we saw a sign for the "Monroe Park Gold Mining Museum." Always interested in obscure museums, I quickly found a spot to do a U-turn and we turned into a well-kept park, with picnic tables, and playground and a few newly painted museum buildings. There was a bunkhouse, an assay office and a mess hall.



Although this was not the site of an actual gold mine, this was "The Official Gold Mining Interpretive Center for the Commonwealth of Virginia." The exhibits were very nice and we learned that gold was discovered in Virginia very early in the 1800s. It was imbedded in hard quartz.

In Fauquier County there were about 18 gold mines and between 1832 and 1861, over 100 mining companies were established in Virginia. The Franklin Mine in Faurquier County, excavated a 300 foot shaft in pursuit of one vein of gold and it produced 1.2 million dollars worth of gold. Early mines employed experienced miners from Wales, England, Germany, Scotland and Ireland.

Everything came to a screeching halt during the Civil War, when Union soldiers destroyed any mines or equipment they came across. After the war, the gold mining in Virginia slowly recovered. The gold ore was extracted by deep shaft mining and "placer" mining which utilized water sluices. But the gold be-

came harder to locate and more sophisticated equipment had to be used. Strip mining scarred the land and the use of cyanide and mercury had to be used to extract the gold from the ore.

What caught our eye as we were driving by the museum were these huge balls. They are called "hornet balls" and they are a mystery. They were found at a gold mining site not far from the museum and it was believed that they were used to grind up the ore to get to the gold. They are hollow and have a "port-hole"

opening on one side. It is believed that ore was placed inside of the balls and then using some type of machine, they were rolled around. But even then, it's hard to understand how the ore could be easily removed. But there's no question that they catch your eye as you're driving along.

So what is the LeRoy connection? Well, in one of the exhibit cases in the Monroe Park Gold Mining Museum, there is a display of items that might have been used in a mining camp, and there in the middle of the case is a 2 ounce bottle of Fenner's Cough and Cold Syrup "free from any opium, morphine or narcotics."

It was compounded by S.C. Wells & Co, Le Roy, NY. "Successors to M.M. Fenner." The Wells Company purchased the rights to Fenner's medicines in Fredonia, in 1914. The medicines included Dr. Fenner's Golden Relief and Dr. Fenner's Family Ointment.

In a note in our files, it also mentions that when Wells purchased the Fenner Company, he also acquired one of Fenner's

best salesmen, Glen Vanderpool, who worked for S.C. Wells until his death in 1949.

The S.C. Wells Company had a long history beginning in 1866 when Schuyler C. Wells bought a drug store on Main Street called Medical Hall. But Wells was convinced the money was in manufacturing the drugs, so he built a large factory, equipped with steam power and stamping presses. By 1873, the business was well established and in 1877 he built the four story factory on Church Street, now known as the *Pennsaver* building.

After Schuyler Wells died, his son, Carl Wells took over the business, and it was under his tenure of the company that Fenner's was purchased. He also acquired a number of other well-known patent medicines. His last purchase was in December 1955 when he purchased Rough-On-Rats from E.S. Wells (not related) of Jersey City, New Jersey. Rough-On-Rats was the oldest registered trade name in rodenticides - - the dead rat on his back. (As an additional note, each year for at least the last twenty years, I have taken a Rough-On-Rats T-shirt to this museum conference and it is sold in an auction to raise money. Everyone who has purchased the Rough-On-Rats shirt wears it to the auction for a group photograph. This year, the shirt raised over \$100).



Fenners Bottle Made in LeRoy.



Fenners Bottle On Exhibit.

**LeRoy Main Street Walking Tour**  
with Lynne Belluscio

*Walk This Way!* **Sunday, July 19**  
**11 AM & 3PM**

Meet on the steps of the Woodward Library for a leisurely walk up Main Street to the Municipal Building and back to LeRoy House (about 90 minutes).

**Tours limited to 20 people. Call 768-7433**  
Suggested donation \$10 for Strengthen the Arm of Liberty Fund