



# GEM SCOOPS



Vol. 50, No. 9

Pendleton District Gem and Mineral Society

October 2012

## Gold Rush in the Carolinas

### The Bechtler Mint Rutherford County, NC

By James Gray

Christopher Bechtler was born in Pforzheim, a city in the German state of Baden. At the age of fifteen, he was apprenticed to a gold and silver metallurgist and gunsmith.

In 1829, Bechtler emigrated to the United States and landed in New York on October 12th, accompanied by his sons, August and Karl, and his nephew, Christopher Jr. Within two weeks they moved to Philadelphia, applied for citizenship, and soon thereafter opened a jewelry and clock repair business.

Sometime in March or April, 1830 the Bechtlers moved to Rutherford County, North Carolina and purchased a tract of land 3 1/2 miles north of Rutherfordton, the county seat. It is not known why the Bechtlers came to a remote region of North Carolina, but it is suspected that they had heard of the recent gold strikes in the area. In July, 1830, Bechtler announced in the "North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser", a regional newspaper, that he had opened a

### OCTOBER MEETING

**WHEN:** October 16, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

**WHERE:** Hayden Conference Center in the Clemson Gardens

**TOPIC:** The Bechtler Mint (1831-1850)

The first gold rush in this country was in the Carolinas in the early eighteen hundreds and the first dollar gold coin in the United States was minted not far from here. We will present a video about the Bechtler Mint and discuss a possible field trip to the historical Reed Mine. The Nominating Committee will present their slate of officers. Finally, the Field Trip Committee will present plans for this fall. Refreshments will be served by Dale Baughman and visitors are always welcome.

jewelry and watch clock repair business in Rutherfordton. In 1831, the local miners and merchants petitioned Congress to establish a branch mint in the gold producing region, but the petition was ignored. Shortly thereafter, several miners approached Bechtler and convinced him to assay their gold and convert it into coins.

On July 2, 1831 and for several months thereafter, Bechtler advertised in the "North Carolina Spectator and Western Advertiser" that he was ready to convert raw gold into coins at his home. Bechtler made his own dies, planchets, presses and other equipment and was assisted in the operation by August and Christopher, Jr. Late in 1831, the Bechtlers produced the first gold dollars struck in the United States.

### Nominating Committee Slate of Officers

President: Robert Lund  
Vice Pres.: John Palmer  
Secretary: To be determined  
Treasurer: John Ishler  
Directors: Larry Boller, Past President; Jim Dusenberry; Fred Sias; Ted Wallenius.

### NOVEMBER MEETING

The November meeting of the PDGMS will be on Tuesday, November 20, 2012.

### 2012 Officers

President:  
V.P. :  
Secretary:  
Treasurer: John Ishler 864-885-9126

### 2012 Directors

Ted Wallenius 864-882-3940  
Jim Dusenberry 864-654-5741  
Fred Sias 864-654-6833  
Rich Warner 864-654-0913

### The Reed Gold Mine

The Reed Gold Mine, near Charlotte, NC, is the site of the first documented gold find in the United States. From this discovery, gold mining spread gradually to nearby counties and eventually into other southern states. During its peak years gold mining was second only to farming in the number of North Carolinians it employed. The estimated value of gold recovered reached over one million dollars a year. North Carolina led the nation in gold production until 1848, when it was eclipsed by the great rush to California.

John Reed (Johannes Reith) was a Hessian soldier who left the British army near the conclusion of the Revolutionary War and came to settle near fellow Germans living in the lower Piedmont of North Caro-

lina. Most of the people dwelt on modest family-run farms in rural areas, where they raised small grain crops such as corn and wheat.

The life of farmer John Reed would have been long forgotten had it not been for a chance event one Sunday in 1799. On that day, Reed's son Conrad found a large yellow rock in Little Meadow Creek on the Reed farm in Cabarrus County. This rock reportedly weighed 17 pounds and for three years was used as a door-stop at the Reed house.

In 1802 a Fayetteville jeweler identified the gold nugget. He purchased it for the asked price of \$3.50—one-tenth of one percent of its true value.

The following year John Reed began the Reed mining operation by forming a partnership with three

local men. The partners supplied equipment and workers to dig for gold in the creek bed, while Reed provided the land. The returns were to be divided equally. The men mined mainly in the off-season from farming, giving first priority to raising their crops. Before the end of the first year, a slave named Peter had unearthed a 28-pound nugget. Using only pans and rockers to wash the creek gravel, the part-time miners recovered an estimated yield of one hundred thousand dollars by 1824.

Portions of the underground tunnels at the Reed mine have been restored for guided tours. A visitor center contains exhibits of gold and historical mining equipment. An orientation film highlights the first gold discovery, and tours of a restored ore-crushing stamp mill are offered.

Map showing route to the Hayden Conference Center

