

From the Mineral Inventory Files

Mooseland – Where and ‘Howe’ it all Began

Gold mining began in Nova Scotia in June 1860 at Mooseland, Halifax County. The precious metal was first discovered there in 1858 by British army officer Captain Champagn L'Estrange, who was moose hunting there with Mi'kmaq guide Joe Paul. This discovery went unheralded until Mr. Paul took Musquodoboit prospector John Gerrish Pulsifer to the site in June 1860. Pulsifer recognized the significance of the find and immediately travelled to Halifax to report the discovery and make claim to it. On his way to Halifax, Pulsifer stopped at Tangier village and made note of what might be similarly gold-mineralized veins there. A local farmer, Peter Mason, followed up on Pulsifer's advice and shortly thereafter turned up gold in these veins. The first gold rush of Nova Scotia was on!

Prior to 1860 the province did not have a gold mining industry. Big mining here consisted of coal mining in the rich coal basins of Cape Breton, New Glasgow and Springhill, and iron mining in Londonderry and the Annapolis Valley. Gold, and the incredible excitement it elicits, was new to Nova Scotia. The government was unprepared for a gold rush and, according to government writings of the day, they knew it. The province had no Mines Department and no staking system. Officials were aware of the positive effects of a gold industry but they were also aware of the stories of lawlessness and violence coming out of the California and Australia gold rushes of the 1840s. The government of Nova Scotia wanted to control the economic impacts and still maintain the rule of law.

At this point none other than Joseph Howe entered the story. Word of the discovery was spreading and people were on the move. Lieutenant Governor George Phipps instructed Howe, in his capacity as Provincial Secretary and, hence, responsible for mineral development, to visit Mooseland and report post haste. Howe, accompanied by King's College scientist Professor Henry How, left for Mooseland on June 30, 1860. Their two and a half day trek to Moose-

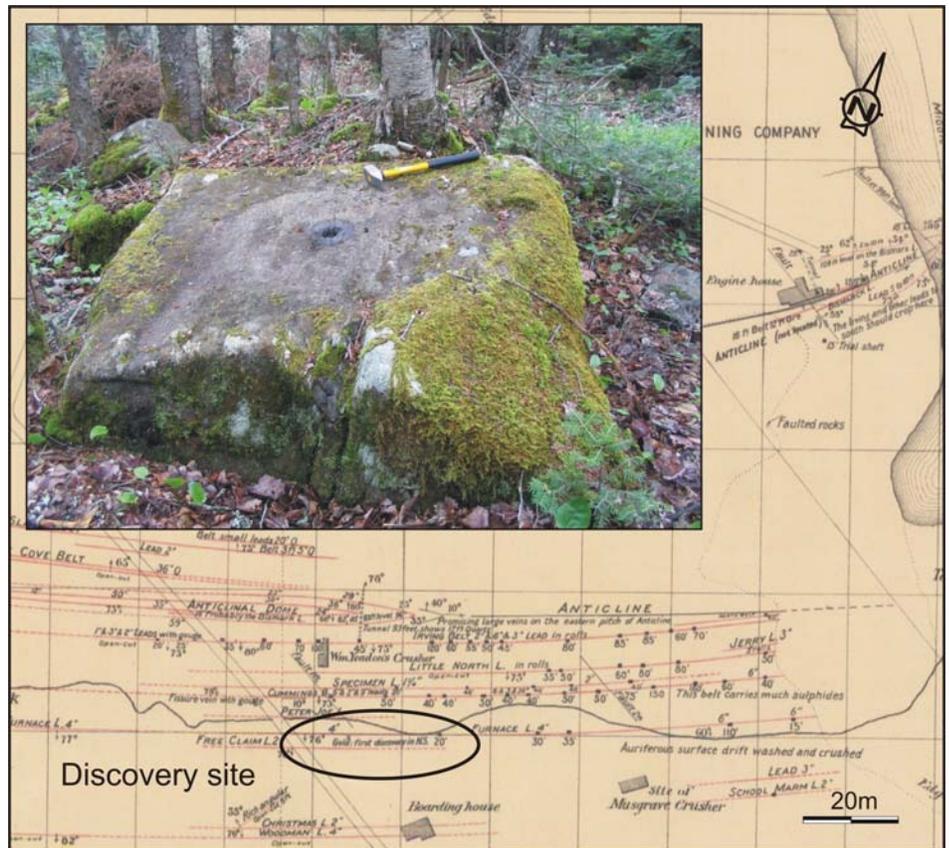


Figure 1. Excerpt from E. R. Faribault's 1899 Mooseland Gold District map (GSC Map #648) showing the location of the "Gold: first discovery in N.S.". Inset is the rock base of a primitive aarastra crusher used by early workers at Mooseland.

land took them to Jeddore, inland via boat to the head of Lake Charlotte and then cross country on foot east through wilderness for 29 km to the find, a small, east-flowing stream into the Tangier River (Fig. 1). Howe's written comments on the trip showed that he did not put much credence in the significance of the find. At the head of Lake Charlotte they met 11 prospectors on their way to the site and at the site there were already about 100 prospectors at work. The next day another hundred arrived and when Howe left they passed another 60 men. All this was within a week or two of the original find. Howe assembled all those present and stated that the Crown intended to maintain order and organize the mining rights via a staking system. A govern-

ment representative remained on site to adjudicate activities and survey a preliminary staking system of 20x30 ft. claims using the stream as a baseline.

A lot happened in the year following Howe's Mooseland visit. The Tangier, Waverley, Ovens, Lawrencetown, Goldenville, Wine Harbour, Gold River and Isaacs Harbour gold districts were discovered. Howe's early pessimistic opinion of the gold potential also changed to one of exuberance. In fact, so much was thought of the province's gold potential that Queen Victoria's son, Prince Alfred, made a visit to the gold workings at Tangier in October 1861. Nova Scotia had come of age as a *bona fide* gold producer.

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