

# Harwinton's 'Lost' Lead Mine: Fable?

By BILL DOMONELL

Lead Mine Brook will be crossed three times by a traveler proceeding east on Route 4 from Torrington before coming into the center of Harwinton. This traveler might well reason that if there is a Lead Mine Brook there either must be a lead mine, or must have been one in the past, and this would most likely lead to the question, "If there is/was a mine, where is it?" That's a very good question!

Early Indian and settler traditions relate that deposits of both black lead (graphite or plumbago) and massive or block lead (galena) had been found near its banks.

Yet, although many people have searched for the "lost mine" no one has actually found it, although some of the searchers have reported finding traces of each. Had there been an actual mine it surely would have been reported in the mineralogical and geological reports written about Connecticut in 1837 and 1842. Neither of these very comprehensive reports, however, lists Harwinton as having a deposit of graphite or galena, let alone make mention of there being any mine. When did this story of a lead mine begin?

Early in 1657 two Farmington settlers, John Stanley and John Andrews, traveled far westward into the wilderness of the Naugatuck Valley on a hunting trip. When they returned home, they brought back a specimen of black lead (graphite). The early account does not say that they found the specimen, or that they dug it—only that they brought it. On Feb. 8, 1657, two other Farmington residents, William Lewis and Samuel Steele, obtained a deed from three Tunxis sachems to "A psell or A tractt of Land called Matetacoke, that is to Say, the hill from whence John Stanley and John Andrews: brought the the black lead & all the Land within Eight: mylle: of the Hill..." And where is that hill?

The East Harwinton Records of 1732 place the "Lead Mine Hills" between Farmington and Litchfield. Harwinton's first historian, Chipman (1860), stated that a vast deposit of lead existed

in a natural condition so pure as to be malleable "without previous fusion" and was to be found in the high lands in the the southern and eastern portions of the town somewhat northeast of the mouth of "Lead-mine Brook".

Beer's "Atlas of Litchfield County" (1874) pinpoints the mine with large hachured (shaded) areas on each bank of the East Branch of the Lead Mine Brook, a short distance above the spot where it merges with the West Branch to form the Lead Mine Brook, and labels the area "Lead Mine." No mine has ever been found there however.

Mr. Chipman wrote that a "large band of men" searched for the mine. Some accounts state that there were 100 men in the search party, while other accounts give the figure as high as 500. This party was divided into three groups each under the charge of a clergyman who took a specific area to search for the "elusive mine." The minister leading the middle section carried a large bell with which he could signal the others about the discovery of the mine. Although the searchers worked through the day "feint though pursuing" there was no need to sound the bell because nothing was found.

It is not known whether all three parties searched their allotted territories thoroughly and completely.

Many people believe that there is no mine and it is only a legend which got out of hand through the passage of time. One account states that a hunter came upon the "great lead rock" quite by accident and cut off a piece which he could conveniently carry upon his shoulders. He had not gone too far when the hand of the Devil gave him such a blow that he not only dropped his prize, but he also suffered such physical injury that it took quite some time before he regained his strength.

During the French and Indian War (1754-1763) another resident supposedly cut off large pieces of lead from a rock outcrop and used them to make bullets for his musket. When he returned to the spot for more material, "the lead-rock was somehow missing, and he never could find it more."

While eluding a band of patriots dur-

ing the Revolutionary War, Captain Moses Dunbar, a Tory sympathizer, supposedly came upon a cave which had a large vein of almost pure black lead in the back wall. The next day he told one of his men that there was enough lead there "to make bullets for all the King's Armies to last out the war." Making bullets from black lead would be quite a miraculous feat since that is the "lead" found in a lead pencil! Apparently Dunbar told no one of the cave's location, and was prevented from returning to the cave because he was captured a few days later and was hanged in Hartford as a traitor.

While the existence of a lead mine in some or all of the aforementioned tales could have been attributed to tradition, written accounts exist in the Harwinton land records which substantiate the presence of such a mine. In 1860, 23 acres of land were leased for mining purposes, and when the estate of one of the partners was probated it was found that he had a \$5 interest in a "Black Lead Mine, Harwinton." According to two receipts in the Litchfield Historical Society he had also spent a total of \$24.65 in a "Black Lead or Plumbago Mine, Harwinton, Conn.," \$2 of which was paid for "Drawing Black Lead," and another 37 cents for recording the lease.

In 1905, a 50-pound mineral specimen of lead which had been assayed as being 11/16th's pure was exhibited by a Harwinton resident in a restaurant in Thomaston. He refused to state where he found it or if there were any more of it. When asked if he was going to form a company to work the mineral, he very politely said that that was his business.

Evidence of mining was also found in the area when the Thomaston flood control dam was being built following the disastrous flood of 1955.

While these stories of Harwinton's lost lead mine do not equal the adventurous tales of the Lost Dutchman and the Lost Peralta Mines in Arizona's Superstition Mountains, they do give some hope to the romantic notion that someday, somewhere, somehow, someone will find Harwinton's long "lost" lead mine.