

Museum News: The Lost N_____ Mine

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Many stories have been told about the Lost N_____ Gold Mine. In this day of heightened "political correctness" I am leery of using the "N" word, even though all the stories I read used it in full, and if you listen to newscasts you hear black Americans using it freely. But as to this story, there are so many variations it is hard to know which is correct. In my research I came across a 1913 *El Paso Morning Times* news article purportedly based on interviews with the Reagan Brothers.

The Reagan Brothers had a ranch in the canyon that bears their name in Brewster County. The Reagans had business dealings in Terrell County and at one time owned the Cottage Bar Saloon. They had other business prospects in Terrell County and we count them as our own.

The four brothers - John, Jim, Frank and Lee - ranched in Reagan Canyon around 1884-1900, near the mouth of Maravillas Creek. John and Jim Reagan had a camp at the mouth of the canyon, where they employed a Seminole Negro named Bill Kelley. Kelley was part Negro and part Seminole Indian, whose tribe had escaped to Mexico, integrated into the Mexican culture and spoke Spanish. On this particular day Kelley was sent out to look for stray horses. He did not return so Jim rode downriver to find him. Some distance from the camp, he met Kelley returning to camp, but with no horses.

"Have you been out all day looking for those horses?" Jim asked, sternly, for he was a little put out with his employee.

"Yes," Kelley replied, "I didn't find the horses, but I found a gold mine. Do you want to see the ore?"

But, Jim was having none of that. "We hired you to work stock, not hunt for gold mines! I do not want to see the ore!" Somewhat deflated, Kelley and Reagan returned to camp in silence.

The next morning Kelley handed John Reagan a large chunk of ore and said, "This is gold from my mine."

Figuring that the man was just "goldbricking," John cursed and threw the sample into the river, then proceeded to reprimand Kelley for shirking his duty. This angered Kelley and he quit immediately and went to Sanderson.

At Sanderson Kelley made the acquaintance of a Mr. Lock Campbell. He gave some of his ore samples to Campbell, who had it assayed. The poorest assayed at \$63,000 to the ton. But, before he could give Kelley the good news, he had disappeared completely.

Locals theorized that Kelley, obsessed with the idea that his life was in danger, stole a horse from the Reagans and went back to Mexico. At any rate, he was never heard from again.

John Reagan realized his mistake and teamed with Lock Campbell to hire an old prospector named Finckey to search for the mine. Finckey returned with rich ore samples. He found the mine on the opposite side of the river from Reagan Canyon. He started back with a sack of samples, but became exhausted and hid most of it behind a boulder on the Texas side.

Finckey kept promising to take the men to the mine, but put off the trip. He was seriously injured when a horse threw him at Sanderson and Reagan and Campbell sent him to a hospital in El Paso. When Finckey recovered from his injuries he checked himself out of the hospital and he, too, disappeared, forever.

When Finckey had been searching for the mine across the river from Reagan Canyon in the Sierra Ladrones, there was a gang of horse thieves operating in the area. They ranged up into Texas, as far as Indian Territory.

One day a mysterious stranger showed up in Alpine, Texas and made so many inquiries that he aroused the interest of local citizens and prospectors. He took one into his confidence and told him a story. He had been in jail in the Indian Territory and met a prisoner who said that he was going to be in jail for the rest of his life and that he knew where the richest gold mine in the world was located. It was in Mexico across from the creek known as the Maravillas. He had run with a gang of horse thieves who worked the Ladrones, but his old cronies were dead. The Mexican Rurales killed them one-by-one, and he was the last survivor.

When the gang was fleeing the Rurales and headed to the river, they found an old man who turned out to be an American. He was half-crazed by the sun and terribly afraid that he was going to be killed.

"If you'll only spare my life," he cried out, "I'll show you where to find the richest gold mine on earth."



Illustration: Coronado's Children: Tales of Lost Mines and Buried Treasures of the Southwest, J. Frank Dobie, University of Texas Press, Jun 28, 2010

The outlaw leader seized the opportunity. He robbed the man of his samples and forced him to take them to the mine site. Under threat of a severe death, he made the old man swear to never return to the Ladrones and never reveal to anyone else the location of the mine.

This would explain Finckey's mysterious behavior when he reached Sanderson. If he was under threat of death by outlaws, of course he would want to disappear.

But, the outlaws died, save one and that man ended up in prison in the Indian Territory. He drew a map which eventually became the property of John Young of Alpine.

Young went to Mexico City and got a concession from the Diaz government to operate mines in the Ladrones area. He outfitted a party and proceeded to Reagan Canyon, but found the Rio Grande flooding and impossible to cross. Young's son and another young man tried to swim across, but in fighting the raging current the map was lost. Young and Jones searched, trying to remember the map, but were not successful. The elder Young made a number of claims in the area under the Diaz government's liberal mining laws, but the Diaz government was overthrown at the beginning of the Mexican Revolution and the area became too dangerous to traverse, let alone set up mining operations.

And so, this part of the story ends. The Lost N_____ Goldmine has never been found. If you want to read about all the variations on the story, get Elton Miles' book, *Tales of the Big Bend*, Elton Miles, College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1976.

As for the Reagan Brothers, they went on to stake claims in Arizona, but never made much on their investments. They let the best prospect they ever had slip through their fingers. Isn't that the way most gold mine/get rich quick stories end?