

afternoon of that momentous November day, a few of the county's best farmers congregated in the rear of H. B. and L. W. Williams' emporium (store located at the corner of the second ward)...Major Ben Morrow did the most of the talking. He invited the crowd into the back room of the store where we examined seven or eight of the largest turnips that ever grew in the county. These were thoroughly examined and pronounced most excellent. There was nothing else in the room intended for exhibition, we were asked out in the yard to pass judgement on a horse colt and a mule colt - one year old the next spring, their tails and man perfectly matted with cockleburs - next was a very fine Durham bull, belonging to Major John Caldwell. This constituted the first fair. Col. B. W. Alexander urged its repetition with greater effort."<sup>132</sup>

In 1848 Captain (later to become Admiral) Charles Wilkes of the U. S. Navy got possession, through foreclosure, of the St. Catherine, Means and Capps Hill mines.<sup>133</sup> The St. Catherine mine had been worked by Penman to a depth of at least 165 feet but apparently had been idle several years and during this time there had been much unauthorized mining by local people. "Wilkes is quoted as saying that poachers had gouged over the surface for gold-bearing material, which they carried to neighboring streams and washed, until the property resembled a 'Rabbit Warren'."<sup>134</sup>

Tompkins indicates that "Admiral Wilkes mined successfully for several years".<sup>135</sup> In addition to actively mining the deposits, it appears that the mines and associated properties were held by Wilkes as investments. A "Map of Charlotte" compiled by F. W. Beers, and published 1877 shows that land in the vicinity of the St. Catherine mine was still

owned by John Wilkes, son of Charles Wilkes. Nitze and Wilkens indicate that John was also owner of the Capps Hill mine in 1895.<sup>136</sup>

Charles Wilkes appears to have had an extraordinary interest in and knowledge about mining in addition to his career in the U. S. Navy. In the 1850's he attempted to interest the U. S. Congress in establishing an iron and steel industry near Fayetteville, N. C. utilizing locally mined materials for the purpose of manufacturing "iron of the very best description for use in the construction of engines and boilers for naval vessels".<sup>137</sup>

In 1849 a plank road from Charlotte to Lincolnton that would have passed close by the Gaston-Lincoln Counties' iron range was proposed.<sup>138</sup> Such a road would have benefited the Mecklenburg Iron Works. In the same year, a contract was let for a railroad connecting Charlotte with Columbia, South Carolina<sup>139</sup> and gold was discovered in California.

The discovery of gold in California marked the close of many of the mines in the southern gold fields, as hundreds of miners went to California. Most of the southern mines, by this time, had become only marginal operations. Many were essentially mined out, others had reached depths below the ground water table where pumping had become an expensive operation. But perhaps the difference in character of ore below the water table accounted for most of the problems. Above the water table, gold veins were weathered and contained "free milling" ore. Such ore could be processed by simple crushing and separation of the gold from waste by some gravity method, such as a rocker, or a combination of a gravity method plus amalgamation. This condition was