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D'Annemours Memoirs

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D'Annemours Memoirs

As many old-timers once exclaimed, “There’s gold in them there hills”!!! Indeed, gold, silver, and other valuable minerals are known to have been mined in the Ouachita Mountains in the nineteenth century. One man wrote of a gold mine near the Ouachita River as early as 1803, and also reported that government officials had been told of the gold about forty years earlier. In his “Memoir on the District of Ouachita in the Province of Louisiana,” Charles Francois Adrien Le Paulmier D’Annemours, “former Consul General of France in America,” recorded what he had learned about gold in the upper Ouachita River valley and described such a find.

D’Annemours (also spelled variously as Danemours, d’Anmours, D’annmourr, D’anmourr) was born in 1739 in France. He came to America in 1777, supported the colonies in the Revolutionary War, and moved to Louisiana in 1796, settling in what is now Monroe. At the time, the area’s frontier economy depended on trade in such items as peltries, bear oil, salted meat, and buffalo wool. Of course, D’Annemours would have learned a lot about the wilderness region that included the Ouachita River, after living there for several years. However, he remained skeptical about what he believed to be exaggerated stories from hunters who claimed to have seen “mountains of diamonds, gold mines, precious stones, and I know not how many other treasures.”

Nonetheless, in 1803, D’Annemours reported that “The banks of le Ouachita also have revealed the presence of several ores, and even of gold ore; and it is presumable that carefully conducted investigations of the interior of this district would produce interesting results of this kind.” He went on to say that “It has been about forty years since the government of the province was informed that a gold mine had been discovered in the upper parts of the Ouachita, toward the places where navigation begins to be laborious and often impossible. Immediately an expedition of suitable pirogues was formed to go there. . . There they obtained mineral which proved to be rich; but they asserted that suffocating vapors forced them to abandon this undertaking.” According to D’Annemours, another account of the excursion cited the “fear of savages of the Osage nation—a very belligerent, bold, and cunning tribe—was the cause of the prompt retreat of these Argonauts.” Either way, he observed that for whatever reason, “thus ended that attempt which never has been tried again.”

D’Annemours died a few years later. His original memoirs are preserved by the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The documents were translated and edited in 1994 by the late Samuel D. Dickinson of Prescott, and the translation was published by the Clark County Historical Association.