

# Where is General Braddock's Gold?

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**  
Photography by: **Lance C. Bell**



**General Edward Braddock**  
1695 – 1755

Fortune hunters have attempted to answer that question since it was first discussed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The treasure seekers have been joined by amateur historians, journalists, and students in analyzing possible locations of the gold that has eluded all attempts to be uncovered. While stories surrounding the legend's origins are difficult to document, General Braddock's disastrous military campaign in 1755 has clearly been the inspiration for numerous accounts about it that have appeared in books, magazine articles, and online sites. It is also clear the general's payroll chest continues to stir imaginations and controversies more than 250 years after the historical incident gave rise to the legend. So, how did the legend of Braddock's treasure begin and where are the precious coins?

The historical facts of General Braddock's military campaign are well known. In 1755, British General Edward Braddock was ordered to Virginia where, with two regiments of regular troops and additional militia, he would move westward to Fort Cumberland, Maryland. From that location Braddock's orders directed him to enter the Ohio Valley, capture Fort Duquesne (present day Pittsburgh), and then engage additional French strongholds further north. Even though Britain and France were not formally at war during Braddock's march, the events served as an important prelude to the French and Indian War (1756-1763).

Braddock successfully reached Fort Cumberland in May 1755 and Fort Duquesne in July of the same year. The French moved some of their forces from the fort to a forward position where they attacked the unwanted visitors in a violent encounter that resulted in more than 900 casualties, including a mortal wound to Braddock. It is following the armed clash that most legends begin because the general

allegedly carried a gold-laden chest that went missing during or soon after the battle.

The location of Braddock's gold seems to be dependent upon the geographic locations of the authors who write about it. Stories have been passed down through generations that place the cache anywhere from Alexandria, Virginia, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the general route of Braddock's mission in 1755.

Fairfax County, Virginia's claim to the treasure, is traced to the general's arrival in Alexandria and the subsequent problems he encountered building a road to Winchester, Virginia, for equipment laden troops. After being slowed by rain and mud, General Braddock ordered that two brass cannons be removed from wagons and buried. Gold coins, intended for payroll, were poured into the cannons for safe keeping. The Centerville, Virginia, location was noted and plans were made to retrieve the items at a later date. This story was given credence after it appeared in a historical society publication in 1954.

Allegany County, Maryland, residents often hear that Clarysville, Maryland, hosts the contents of Braddock's payroll chest since it fits the popular requirement of being hidden at the confluence of two streams. More than one metal detector has combed Braddock Run at Clarysville.

The Clarysville location and other related information regarding Braddock's gold was given significant press coverage by William J. Hunt, long-time editor of the *Cumberland Times*, civic leader, and impresario. Older residents recall his "Across the Desk" columns that covered a wide range of topics, including local events surrounding the French and Indian War. In addition to written accounts, Mr. Hunt was an active public speaker and resource for

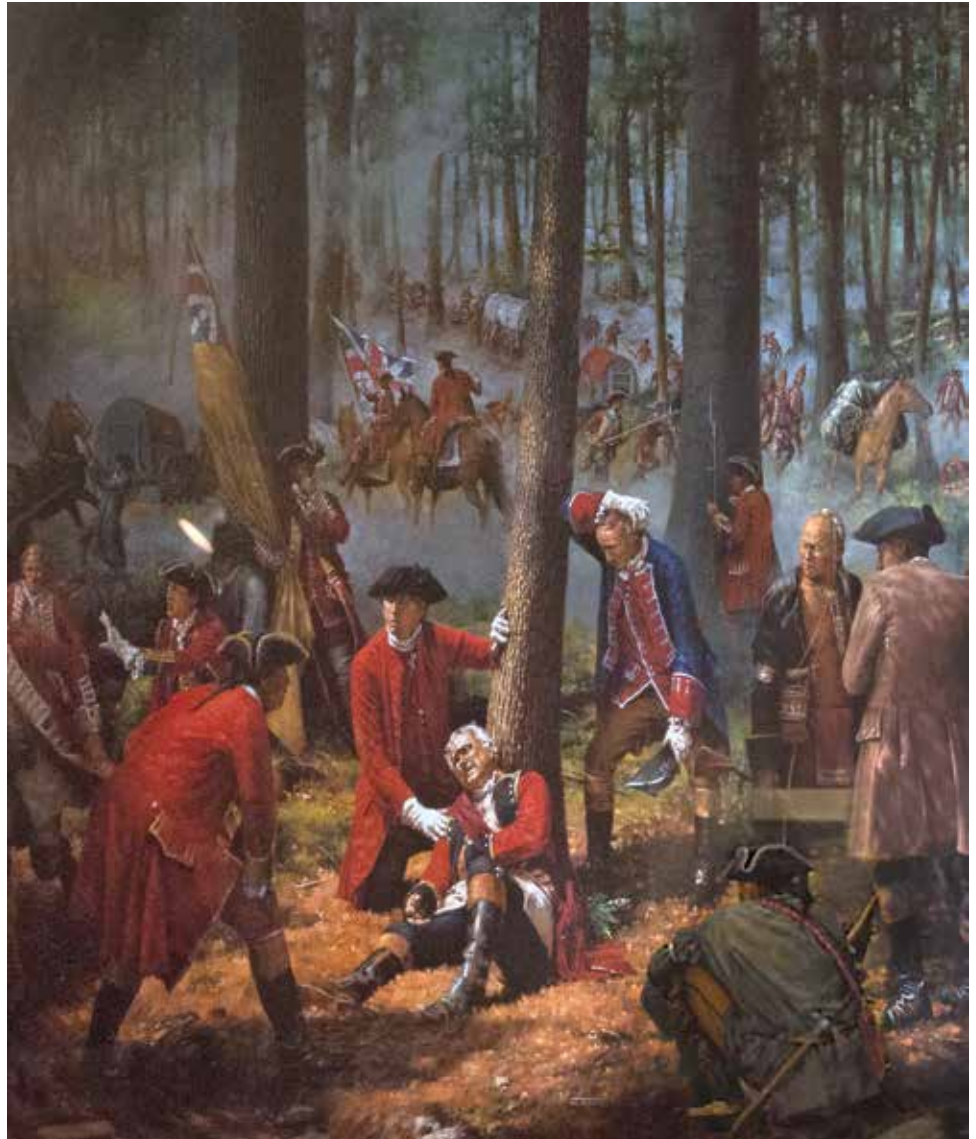
local educators; he noted that Braddock's gold was the most popular topic in classroom discussions. (Hunt's "Across the Desk" columns have been reprinted and made available as a reference in local libraries.)

Mr. Hunt published the first Braddock's gold article in 1945 and followed with an additional 19 over the years. One of the most significant is a popular version of how General Braddock's treasure came to be associated with Allegany County.

According to Hunt's summary, an optimistic General Braddock anticipated that his forces would successfully drive the French from Fort Duquesne and that a supply of money would be necessary to provide for the troops' needs until a proper administration could be established. Braddock's crushing defeat, in 1755, dashed his plans and set in motion a chaotic retreat toward the safety of Fort Cumberland. The general suffered a serious wound during the battle and later died near Uniontown, Pennsylvania. A decision was made to carry the payroll chest to Fort Cumberland, but further attacks on the retreating party prompted the survivors to bury it.

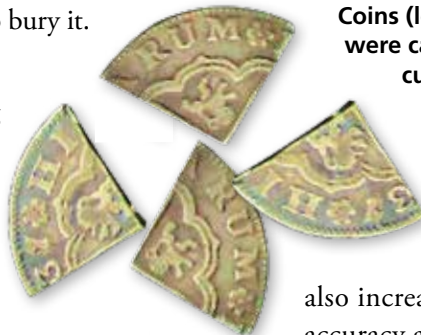
Only one member of the payroll detail survived and was found wandering along Will's Creek in a state of delirium. He could only recall burying the gold at a divided section of Braddock Run, or perhaps where it emptied into Will's Creek. Both locations were near the fort where he sought safety.

A different version of the legend reported by Hunt has the chest buried at the junction of streams feeding Savage River in present day Garrett County, Maryland. A leprechaun is added to this story whose job it is to stand guard over the buried treasure.



**A section of the painting "The Wounding of General Braddock" by Robert Griffing, depicts Braddock's mortal wound from July 1755.**

**Coins (left) used during the French and Indian War were called the "Real" meaning "Royal" and were cut into four or eight pieces. One eighth of a Real is called a "bit."**



William J. Hunt's newspaper articles not only have kept the legends alive but also increasingly gave credence to their historical accuracy as the years passed.

Two prominent Allegany County historians included the Braddock legend in their well known *The History of Allegany County* published in 1923. While doubting its validity, authors' Thomas and Williams nevertheless repeated the folktale of a mysterious man who suddenly scrambled



down a hill and onto a road near Grantsville, Maryland. The unidentified man carried a crowbar and announced to a startled traveler that he had been digging for Braddock's gold that night, and indeed, for many years. The traveler announced that his ancestor, a soldier with the surname of Giles, had served on the Braddock expedition. The mysterious man excitedly exclaimed that his father was a mess-mate of Giles and one of the soldiers in charge of burying Braddock's gold. He begged the Cumberland traveler to join him in the search, but the traveler refused and the mysterious old man was never heard from again.



**General Braddock's grave is located along National Pike, Farmington, PA 15437, near Fort Necessity.**

Pennsylvania probably has more potential locations for the hidden treasure than Maryland or Virginia since the armed encounter occurred within its borders. One of the most popular versions is allegedly based on General Braddock's decision to bury the chest near a walnut tree along the Youghiogeny River.

Additional stories may easily be found that support locations all along the road that Braddock's men blazed to Pittsburgh, yet none have provided proof the gold ever existed. But there is considerable evidence that Braddock's gold fits more comfortably with leprechaun folklore than historical accounts of the time period. Professional historians pay little attention to the treasure stories and even consider them a distraction to more serious matters.

One comprehensive account of Braddock's actions in the colonies was written by Dr. Gordon Kershaw, Emeritus Professor of History at Frostburg State University. Dr. Kershaw's article, appearing in the *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 2001, repeatedly notes the difficulties that Braddock had in financing and generally providing for his troops during the campaign—hardly an endorsement of the gold coin legend. Funds for the troops were anticipated to arrive in



**Some of the wrought iron, hand forged artifacts recovered along Braddock's Road by Bob Bantz, historical researcher and documentarian of Braddock's Road.**



Philadelphia late in 1755 following the capture of Fort Duquesne. Private contractors could expect the same time frame for payment. It is evident that any funds Braddock had in his possession were for smaller expenses and insufficient to cover basic campaign costs. Furthermore, Thomas Penn, proprietor of Pennsylvania, and a credible source, stated in official correspondence that Braddock's money never fell into enemy hands. The army paymaster corroborated Penn's account by noting any money Braddock did possess was held at a nearby camp. Finally, no official report of Braddock's defeat recorded a missing payroll chest.

Additional arguments against Braddock's treasure existing include: the unlikely decision by Braddock to carry a large sum of money into battle, a lack of evidence that Braddock was paying his men in precious coins, and the simple fact that no one has found it after two and a half centuries of road building, housing development, and commercial growth along the route.

While not the golden cache treasure hunters have been seeking, numerous artifacts have been uncovered that

possess intrinsic wealth. Primary documents cataloged over the years also added to the historical record of British forces in the region, while generating revenue through the development of heritage tourism—Braddock's grave, Fort Necessity, and Jumonville Glen historical sites in Fayette County, Pennsylvania, stand as examples.

Despite the facts being on the side of skeptics, there is always a chance that Braddock's gold is safely hidden and waiting to be uncovered by a lucky treasure hunter. Those who continue to search will always be motivated by the thrill of the hunt and the gold coins that await them.

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*The author acknowledges the essays of Dr. Kershaw; Thomas and William's volumes on Allegany County; William J. Hunt; An Inquiry into the Legend of Braddock's Gold in Northern Virginia, by Phillips and Nygren; and Bob Bantz for his historical research and documentation of the Braddock's road and earlier trails in the region.*

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