



DEADWOOD'S BELOVED PROSPECTOR: Potato Creek Johnny

In 1883, seventeen-year old John E. Perrett, later known as Potato Creek Johnny, immigrated from Wales to the Black Hills in search of gold. He staked his claim and began working the gulches on Iron Creek and Potato Creek (Spearfish Canyon).

While working his claim on Potato Creek, John Perrett found a large gold nugget in May, 1929. The 4-inch-long nugget, weighing 7-3/4 troy ounces, is considered one of the largest pieces of gold found in the Black Hills. Perrett later sold the nugget to W.E. Adams for \$250. (A replica of the nugget is on display in a center case on the main floor of the Museum. The original nugget is still owned by the Museum.) After finding the leg-shaped nugget, Potato Creek Johnny often commented that he had "been looking for the rest of the leg ever since."

Potato Creek Johnny became a major Deadwood tourist attraction during the 1930s and early 1940s. At a height of four feet three inches with long whiskers and dressed in buckskin clothes, Johnny looked like the quintessential old-time prospector. In addition to demonstrating gold panning to tourists, Johnny also marched with a miniature wheelbarrow in the annual Days of '76 Parade. Bystanders reported seeing Potato Creek Johnny walk on his hands, dance jigs, and throw pennies to the crowds. When he was 73, Johnny represented the Deadwood Chamber of Commerce at a travel show in Chicago, appeared on a national radio program, and had his picture featured in *Life Magazine*.

John E. Perrett died at the age of 77 on February 26, 1943 after a short illness. He was laid to rest next to Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane in Mount Moriah Cemetery in Deadwood.

A reproduction of the photo above is available for purchase in the museum's [gift shop](#).



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