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Oklahoma Had Gold Rush, Too

About the time Coronado was traversing Oklahoma's southern boundaries, another Spanish expedition may have reached this area, according to "The Story of Oklahoma" by historian Muriel Wright.

De Soto, with 600 men and large droves of horses, cattle and hogs came across the southern part of North America, reaching the Mississippi River. Disappointed at not finding gold, he fell sick and died. His friend, Moscono, took command and, with a number of his party, explored the Arkansas River almost to the present boundary of Oklahoma.

For at least 50 years after Coronado's expedition, other Spaniards looked for the fabled Quivira. Some of them passed through Oklahoma in their quests for golden bells said to hang from branches of trees, lulling the king of the country to sleep with sweet music as they tinkled in the breeze.

In 1650, Don Diego del Castillo spent several months in the Wichita Mountains, prospecting for gold and silver. No precious metal was found. However, Spaniards reported the discovery of pearls in neighboring streams.

A hundred years later, BeBrevel, a trader from southern Louisiana, traveled up the Red River where he heard a noise "like the explosion of a cannon." Indians told him "it was the spirit of the white people, working in their treasure." He later learned it was the Spaniards prospecting in the vicinity.

The "lost Spanish mines" of the Wichita Mountains were talked about, even in recent times, but they have never been found. About the time of statehood there was a brief "gold rush" to the little town of Meers and a number of mines worked. It turned out there was more work than gold and the fortune hunters turned elsewhere.