

The Paterson Pearls

In February 1857, a Paterson shoemaker named David Howell went fishing for mussels and his harvest resulted in the Paterson Pearl Rush. Attributed as the first gem rush in American History, this event put Paterson to the forefront of national and international awareness for something besides our industrial achievements.

These pearls you see before you are several examples of the pearls recovered in the months following Howell's first find. These freshwater pearls are formed by Unio or River Mollusk. All of the "Paterson Pearls" were found in the Notch Brook, which was actually located in the neighboring township of Ackquackanock, modern day Clifton. The brook still exists, but is no longer above ground, due to the development of Route 46 in that area.

The "mania" that followed the initial find inspired thousands to flock to the area. Within a few months, no mollusks remained in Notch Brook.

Illustrations from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, May 28, 1857.

