

The "Far West" in the Days of '97, As Told by Capt. J. Allen Bigelow

The following letter was written to George H. Mitchell, one of the former owners of the Eccentric, and was gleaned from the old files of the paper. It describes in an interesting manner the life of what was, in '97, the "Far West." The author, Captain J. Allen Bigelow, lives on West Maple avenue, Birmingham, and is one of the best known and highly respected citizens.

Following is the letter:

Deadwood, S. D., Sept. 18, 1897. Dear Mitchell—Mort woke me up this morning and said, "Let's get in our glad clothes, go to Deadwoods and Lead City, Homestake Mine and visit today, "Daddy." So here we are at the Bulllock Hotel. Yum, but it's a swell one. Mort is shaking hands with a solid, iron looking man. "Carson, this is my father from Michigan," and in 20 minutes we were well acquainted. "Do you smoke, Mr. Carson? We'll smoke." So you are Mort's father. He told me he had a feverish way off in Michigan, didn't believe it though. I had a daddy once, too. Kit Carson—he used to go around and make history—didn't realize it, though. He was an odd stick—never would stay at home and work around the ranch. He'd rather take his gun and go off all alone and would hold in front of a band of Indians, skip out among the hills and draws and canons. Mother used to argue with him, but to no use, he would look at her with those great blue eyes, take her on his knees and say, "There, there, Puss, I just get 'on easy' and can't stay." He was a cap different from me—conservatively old and was very stern with his family, except with mother, and you know that's apt to be the case. I used to treat to tie me on a Mustang, if ever he caught me in a lie or a saloon.

"Did he ever?" "Not much, prevarication and exaggeration is never indulged in, irrigation is occasionally. There goes your son, Lieut. Bigelow, with young Treber and, by the way, that young Treber used to attend school at the Michigan Military Academy." "Yes, that's near where I live." "No, Well that's odd, and another Treber boy is gone there this coming year. Col. Rogers runs the school, I believe." "Shall we stroll around?" "All right." "Yes, we shall get tired so don't care if we do." "No not much. No man with an empty sleeve can pay for anything in this country. God bless you, Captain, if you'll say the word, we'll have a hunting party formed in two hours and you shall have 15 days with all kinds of game, except peccot, and everything free. Can't stay, hey? Well your boy is going with us next month and he shall skin a grizzly. That new House? Oh yes, that's Judge Mitchell's new shanty. Why his new horse barn will cost for foundation alone \$1,000. Yes, everybody who builds has to blast out a flat place in the side of the mountains. Collier, bless your heart, man, to build rock. Deadwood, you see is built entirely in this gulch, it's just wide enough for one street and that water comes from the Homestake Mine and some of it's mine, too, about \$18 per day, could have more if we'd say so, that's enough—if it'd only run Sundays. Yes, the houses are built all that one way one above the other, right on the mountains. Makes heaps of trouble though for when a new street is laid out and the blasting begins in order to level things off, then the rocks roll on the roofs of the houses below and it certainly does cause hard feelings."

"How many inhabitants?" "Oh, 6,000, and Lead City about the same." "How far to Lead City?" "Two miles, right up the gulch. That's 'Poor Man's Gulch,' the one running southwest, the other is 'Dead Man's Gulch.' This now is Chinatown, come in and shake hands with Ah Sin. He's the same heathen who couldn't play curbs, but his bank account today is about six pigmes and he's high monkey monk in '97, a town and now let's go see High 'Gank and his old stage—yes the same. That's his old stage and we are going to build a museum for that and several other relics. He has six mules set up, skinned and stuffed—natural and fatter than in life." "Well, well, well, so you are from Michigan. Yes, I am getting things in shape to cash in. Thank you, Mr. Carson, I do feel a vacuum 'bout this time of day. There, I feel better. Yes, I'm the same man, hum, but that's like a dream. Confound him; tell you all about it—well you see 'twas this way: I was a likely young man and staked out a claim on him when he was called the man of the times and what did he do but up and tell me to 'go West, young man, go West' and blamed if I didn't follow his advice and drifted around trying to keep up a gentleman's appearance, but a tenderfoot had no show and finally I took to teaming and found I could just put one check and do plenty of work. Then old Ben Haldiday took a notion to me and one way and another I was on the box handling the mails and the mules (freight (small parcels) and passengers. How my heart beat one day, who one of my passengers was—the same old cayuse who told me to 'go West,' and as he was putting himself aboard his dream 'ere not of the tenderfoot he advised to 'go West,' told mine were 'good healthy mules.' Only four, eh, well he rode behind six and Hank Monk was the driver.

"The street and highway commissioners had been pretty busy that season acting as cornerers and the trails along the canons were not exactly fitted for roller skates, but they just fitted my feelings and I was bound he should breathe with spurts and starts—mostly spurts. He had a newspaper but the secretary diverted his attention at first, then he tried to read some hand writing and began writing and began mumbling to himself, then tried to talk with the other passengers but you see he wore a tall hat and that made a stack of chips too big to buck against. The trail kept getting fresher and more frisky and those mules seemed to be afraid, they wouldn't get in on time, while I felt the same way. Now and occasionally I'd cast a steer eye through the stop hole and a chuckle would rise up, but only once I saw his teeth chatter, that was when we forded the north fork. Then he tried to call me but those pesky mules kept me terribly busy, and once after that I bunched my eyes and I really think he was saying, "New I lay me down to sleep," just then we pulled up to Bob Rooney's 'Palace Hotel' where

we had to change mules which took just six minutes and would you believe the man had run to Rich and told him that I was deaf and he believed crazy, said that human life was not safe with me in charge of the conveyance, that he had a family to support and a very important mission to fill and a whole book full of such expressions and wouldn't Mr. Rooney explain that his health was being shattered and twisted. "Oh, certainly," says Rooney, "but this makes me feverish" and wound up by saying that we come to a full understanding. He spoke something about 'breid' that upon the waters' but I told him I never did. But my vengeance was not full yet, there was another ten play my hand and I was bound to turn my hair—black—black as can be. Oh, how I gloated, yes that's it, I was satisfied and he had to be. The 'er has a job every week now of making my hair black." We will adjourn for dinner, and by the way, the auditorium at Chicago, Cadillac at Detroit and Murray Hill, N. Y., all first class hotels and so is this, "The Bulltown." The large dining room with perhaps forty tables and more or less filled are attended by water girls, neat and tidy looking, moving as softly as kittens after mice. Our table is fully scented and a very venerable and mild looking gentleman on my left, as the soup bowed his head and not a move was made as his grateful thanks were sent skyward. Then to my surprise Mr. Carson introduced me to him, the Rev. Mr. Willoughby, the man who preached Buck Fannshaw's funeral sermon and officiated at the obsequies. This then was the man who had braved the hardships of the pioneer life to administer consolation among the rough miners and all the elements given to mortals, the man who had transformed Scotty Brigg's character and moulded him into a pastor in the Sabbath School. Truly, my lines today have been very kaleidoscopic, and as Mort said in the morning, we'll get into sun "glad clothes," so glad thoughts in a whirlpool glide, worked off my desire to eat. Then came more sight-seeing and hand-shaking forming new acquaintances and a visit to the assayer's office. Today I'll not say more.

J. A. B.



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