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GOLD CAMP

Alder Gulch and Virginia City, Montana

By LARRY BARSNESS

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To Sue and Charlie Bovey

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

CHAPTER ONE

Discovery at Alder Gulch 1

CHAPTER TWO

Virginia City, Melting Pot 14

CHAPTER THREE

The "Innocents" 26

CHAPTER FOUR

The Vigilantes 37

CHAPTER FIVE

Taking the Gold from the Gulch 54

CHAPTER SIX

How the B'hoys Lived 68

CHAPTER SEVEN

Free Enterprise in Alder Gulch 81

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Virginia City "Nightherd" 91

CHAPTER NINE

Toll Roads and Freighters 106

CHAPTER TEN
Politicking: Dixie and Yankee Doodle 121
CHAPTER ELEVEN
The Editor, the Colonel and the Wild Irishman 138
CHAPTER TWELVE
Womankind Emancipated!—Dances, Divorces and Bustles 152
CHAPTER THIRTEEN
The Risk-Takers of Trade 167
CHAPTER FOURTEEN
Bounces Unlimited: The Stage Lines 184
CHAPTER FIFTEEN
Saints and Sinners: Salvation's Rough Road in Virginia City 198
CHAPTER SIXTEEN
The Canvas and the Boards: Prize Fighters and Thespians 213
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
The Heathen Chinee 232
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
The Small Fry 246
CHAPTER NINETEEN
Rivers to Ride 258
CHAPTER TWENTY
Placer to Quartz to Resort: Virginia City Carries On! 271
Notes 285
Bibliography 299
Index 305

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CHAPTER ONE

DISCOVERY AT ALDER GULCH

THE SIX PROSPECTORS approached the skyline ridge of the Tobacco Root Mountains cautiously, climbing slowly, leading their horses surreptitiously upward, watching behind for any signs of pursuit as they moved over the crest, making dark silhouettes against the late-afternoon sky. They hoped they might be mistaken for scraggly junipers, if the Crows were still following their sign in the valley below. They hadn't seen the Crows since day before yesterday during the skirmish they'd had with them coming out of the Yellowstone valley. Chances were the redskins were still skulking along, just as they had been since the older chiefs had released the six white men three weeks ago, given them runty Indian ponies in exchange for their own mounts, a smidgin of supplies, and sent them on their way. Some of the young braves had been angered by such softness. They hankered after white men's hair, so they had been following along, watching for a chance to get it.

As the little group mounted and rode across the pass, they were more disgusted that the Injuns had held up their prospecting than they were concerned by their danger. It was late

May, a time for prospectors to be testing every outcropping, not playing hide-and-seek with a bunch of pesky redskins. If they'd had any luck at all they could have been building flumes by now. Damn the luck, damn the Injuns and damn all of Idaho Territory.

These six men—Bill Fairweather, Tom Cover, Henry Edgar, Barney Hughes, Mike Sweeney and Harry Rodgers—were old prospecting partners. Six weeks before they'd had high hopes of striking something really big in this summer of 1863, for they were joining the James Stuart party to test the unexplored gravels of the Yellowstone country. The Stuarts were old-timers in the country surrounding the headwaters of the Missouri, and were sure to turn up something.

Somehow, damn the luck again, the parties had missed their rendezvous at the junction of the Stinkingwater and Beaverhead, though the Fairweather party had camped there for several days. When it became certain they were left behind, they had thrown caution to the winds in their desire to catch up, and had landed smack in the midst of a party of Crows. The only bit of luck they'd had was that a seventh member of their outfit, Lew Simmons, had lived with the Crows at one time, understood them and liked them. He had powwowed with the chiefs for two days, until they finally had relented. Simmons had stayed with the Indians as a semi-hostage, joining the tribe again of his own free will.

The other six, short of supplies and with no idea where the Stuart expedition was, started on the shortest route home, attempting to cover their trail by day, hiding by night. Now, twenty-three days later, as they sneaked over the Tobacco Roots, they knew they should be close to home. And, at the far end of the pass, familiar landmarks greeted them: thirty miles or so in the distance was the mouth of the Stinkingwater, their camping ground of six weeks earlier. Once there, it was up the Beaverhead to the Rattlesnake, then over the

ridge to Bannack City. Four days at the most. Today was the 26th of May. They should be home by June 1st if these blasted Injun cayuses would make it. For tonight, the gulch below offered good cover.

There were pleasant enough camping spots on the way down, springs and little meadows, but no good hiding place. Not until they reached the gulch bottom did they find the cover they needed: a place upstream a way, where the canyon narrowed, where the alder and chokecherries gave cover to man and horse and screening for a fire. Here a man might keep his hair during another long night.

After supper, four of the group unlashed picks and pans and went upstream to prospect, leaving Fairweather and Edgar behind to wash dishes and stake out the horses. Bill was looking for a place for the animals, when he noticed a promising looking rimrock sticking up from a bar in the stream. He yelled at Edgar to bring the tools; mebbe they'd try to wash out a little tobacco money, them ponies could wait awhile.

When Bill had filled a pan, Edgar took it down to the stream's edge. He dipped it expertly under water, then up, swirling it dextrously above the surface, then under again, a few such practiced whirls removing most of the heavy gravel and coarse dirt, leaving only the fine sand and heavy iron particles and—he caught his breath at what he saw. Fairweather's yell from behind startled him.

"I've got a scad!"

"If you have one, I have a hundred!" Edgar shouted back, not missing a swirl, agape at the growing spots of color rolling just under the black sand he was gradually washing over the edge of the pan.

Bill clambered down to show his nugget.

"Nice piece of gold," Edgar said, and nodded toward the pan.

Bill whistled.

"Pretty good for tobacco money," said Edgar.

They weighed out what they had. Bill's nugget was worth $2.40 and Edgar's pannings the same, at Bannack gold prices.

Horses and unwashed dishes forgotten, they scurried back to the rimrock in the failing twilight. Again they filled pans, working carefully in the ledges and cracks of the treasure rock, scraping dirt out of every crevice where gold might have lodged. These second pans washed out a total of $7.50! Jesus! They were rich!

It was too dark to keep on panning, but it was no time for washing dishes either. Throw the damn things in the brush—washing dishes is for poor men!

So their partners found the two of them sitting by the fire, chores undone. Grumpy because they had not panned a flake of gold, the four grumbled some about partners lazing among dirty dishes while the horses were still uncared for. Bill handed them the pan with their gold samples to shut them up.

"Salted," sang out Sweeney. Rodgers sniffed agreement. The two were getting testier every day. "All right, we'll look after the horses ourselves."

Edgar exploded. "By God, you and them damn horses can go to the devil or the Injuns, fer all I care! You kin pipe Bill and me down and run us through a sluice box, but you couldn't get a color. We washed this here dust from a bar not half an hour ago."

"We thought we could use a little tobacco money in Bannack," said Bill. "There it is—twelve dollars and thirty cents' worth."

The gulch saw its first celebration that night. Not as raucous as later ones would be, for there was no liquor, but the b'hoys sat up so late that night they got hungry again and had another venison feast, and continued to sit around the cheerful fire, Indians and the woes of the last six weeks forgotten in the wild talk of the future of this, their secret gold mine.

When the talk ran out, they dreamed into the dying fire: Fairweather fondling his discovery nugget, buying imaginary drinks for the house, Sweeney and Rodgers pacing the deck of a ship bound home for Newfoundland, Edgar and Hughes prospecting in style on this new grubstake; Cover calculating the best way to work this new capital. When they turned in, sleep was nigh impossible.

They were up muddying the clear waters of the stream by the gray light of dawn, each of the six excavating likely spots, taking pannings from every promising outcropping, working each way from discovery. The creek remained muddy all day, for the men panned without letup, squatting at water's edge with muscles cramped, hands numb and aching from the icy water. The ground exceeded their hopes; by nightfall they had sacked enough dust to buy their grubstake in Bannack.

The following morning they staked the ground they had chosen, proclaiming to the world that they pre-empted this land by right of discovery, according to the mineral laws of the Territory, although they had no intention of letting the world in on their secret until after they had returned and skimmed the easy pickin's from their find. They named the place Alder Gulch, for the many alders growing on its banks. By early afternoon they were fighting the brush of the lower gulch, on their way to Bannack, pinpointing landmarks as they went.

Behind them, water clouded from panning cleared again. Trampled grass began to reshape itself. Except for the tiny scars left by the prospectors, the place appeared much as it had before. But never again would Alder Gulch look as nature had formed it.

In June of 1863, Bannack had been a "city" for less than a year. Some five hundred Argonauts had settled there in the fall of 1862, lured to the spot by the richness of the placers

discovered by John White in August. The camp grew all winter, as news of the great strike in the Idaho gold fields spread, until by spring upward of a thousand gold-hungry emigrants headquartered there. They found the good claims on Grasshopper Creek gone; their appetite for gold still unslaked, they were in a mood to stampede.

When the Fairweather party rode into town and began making purchases with foreign gold dust, rumor magnified their pokes to a horse-load of gold, and the populace went wild. These b'hoys had come west intending "to see this thing out and make a fortune here, *if I have to stay six weeks.*" For most of them, the six weeks was long gone and the only gold they had seen belonged to other men. Now they followed these lucky prospectors about town, treating them like princes, yet watching their every move, weighing their every word for some clue as to where they had washed their gold. The items they bought were obviously supplies for men who intended to do some placer mining . . . the stories they told were too pat . . . they were in an awful sweat to get out of town. Not even Bill Fairweather, a man who loved his bottle, had time for a big drunk after six weeks of abstinence. Edwin Booth himself couldn't have fooled this audience.

The discoverers intended to leave again June 1st, but the excitement in town was so great they put it off. The next day they sneaked off, only to find a large crowd of men waiting for them at Rattlesnake crossing and that others had been following them. That night they slept in the center of a circle of stampeders who watched them all night. The next day the crowd grew until they were traveling with two hundred or more men. Excitement was so high a stampeder was shot coming through the brush, mistaken for a beaver.

The following day the Fairweather party could see it was all up with any hopes of returning to Alder Gulch secretly. They camped about noon and called a miners' meeting. They

admitted their find, showed samples, but refused to go on unless their claims were guaranteed. The crowd voted the guarantee, and impetuously went further, granting to the discoverers exemption from ever having their claims jumped and releasing them from the usual obligation of at least one day a week representation work in order to hold a claim.

With these guarantees, Fairweather and his friends led on the next day, camping at evening within easy distance of Discovery. That night, fearful that their stakes might be pulled up by someone during tomorrow's mad scramble, Barney Hughes sneaked ahead to be on the spot. He took some of his Irish friends with them, so that they might get good claims. Others sneaked ahead in the darkness also, but made a bad turn up Granite Creek and greedily panned its sterile sands before discovering their mistake. Those left behind during the night made ugly threats when the absences were discovered. Luckily, the gulch was big enough and the strike strong enough to provide claims for all.

Edgar led the remaining stampeders into the lower canyon of Alder Creek before remarking, "This is the place." They all rushed on ahead of him, every man in a sweat to get his stakes down within the hour. Edgar loitered along, knowing his claims were safe under Hughes's Irish eye. When he reached Discovery at four o'clock, the creek was all staked.

A miners' meeting was held the next day at which a committee of six was appointed to work out the regulations for the new mining district. On June 9, the report of this committee was accepted by another meeting, and Fairweather Mining District was ready for all newcomers.

The rules set up by the miners' government established title to each claim in the district. The rules were similar to all such miners' governments in the west, as first established in the strikes in California. In the districts of Alder Gulch (of which there were six eventually: Highland, Pine Grove, Sum-

mit, Fairweather, Nevada, and Junction) no person might possess more than two claims, either by purchase or preemption. In order to retain title, at least three days' work each week had to be done on the claim, except during the winter months. Each claim was one hundred feet wide in the bed of the gulch, extending across the stream bed in a narrow strip. Farther downstream, in the widest parts of the gulch, each claim ran only to the center line of the stream, making two claims for each hundred feet.

The b'hoys of Fairweather District elected the usual officers. Dr. William Steele was chosen President and would preside at all meetings. Dr. G. G. Bissell was elected Judge; his was the duty of trying both civil and criminal cases in miners' court. In a gesture of appreciation to the discoverers, the b'hoys asked Henry Edgar to be Recorder, but he refused to serve. He knew he would get no placering done if he was Recorder. It was a thankless task, for this officer recorded all claims and disposition of claims, and, by his record, claims were legal. It was especially a chore in a newly opened district. James Fergus took the job in Edgar's place.

The b'hoys reckoned that this was enough of officialdom for now. They broke up the meeting without electing a Sheriff; they were too anxious to get to bedrock to bother with law enforcement. Anyway, it was cheaper to do without one; if they gave the job out, they'd have to reach into their jeans for the salary. Besides, no one wanted a job that would keep him from his claim. All in all, it was simpler to meet as a miners' court now and then, try an offender, and if he was found guilty, banish him. A pleasant way to while away a Sunday afternoon at no expense and no time lost. There was no jail in the gulch for more than a year, not until a county government was organized.

A miners' meeting was about as free and easy a legislature as there ever was. Every claim holder had a vote, drunk or

sober. If he wasn't drunk when he arrived, he could be soon after, for whisky peddlers sold rotgut along the fringes of the crowd from crude, portable bars. It was a pure democracy, allowing every one his say and every kind of discussion, including fistic. The b'hoys were young and callow, unused to governing themselves, yet resentful of being told what to do. They started to swing fists when an argument went against them. John Grannis, a pilgrim to the gulch soon after the stampede, noted such a meeting in his diary: "Went to a Miner's Meeting Monday evening. Lemuel Reid got killed. I helped carry him home." [1]

Such disorderly handling of their own affairs put the b'hoys at the mercy of smart operators, who understood the economics of placer gulches and intended to profit by manipulation rather than mucking. They could, by rigging the voting at a miners' meeting, run the district to suit themselves. They called "miner's or rather bummers meetings" which were "to pass the odious code of civil laws gotten up for the benefit of a few pettifoggers." They might try to change the number of days' representation work to be done from two to one or even none. Such a law benefited bummers who let the development work on neighboring claims raise the value of their own. If adjacent claims proved good, the value of theirs jumped accordingly. They could then sell out at a good price, having done no more work than driving their stakes and puttering around on representation days.

Other speculators found it easy to jump claims after the b'hoys were too drunk to care or had staggered away from the meeting, leaving the sharpies in a majority. Since the whole business of staking claims and recording them was haphazard, and since proof of representation work done on so many days of the week was hard to establish, this legalized claim-jumping was available to anyone who could "prove" that the claimholder had no right to his ground, and who

could swing enough votes to have the meeting so rule. Another diarist, writing in the early days of the gulch, wrote bitterly, "Attended miner's meeting in Central District where Stanley lost a claim. So much for the injustice of miner's meetings. . . ." He also noted with satisfaction the meeting at Highland which "opened with motion to adjourn sine die and carried by a large majority." [2] To him, this was a most successful meeting.

All miners' meetings were not drunken brawls, but a man never knew when one might go completely irresponsible. The honest miner had to stay on his toes, as did this letter writer from the Prickly Pear:

"The prevailing sentiment in the morning, was to hang the Recorder. This probably would have been done, had the crowd been a *little* drunker. However, the Recorder was relieved of his office, and another appointed; the multitude began to disperse; claims were jumped; new laws passed; the former Recorder was reinstated, and a general confusion followed. We waited until those who were sober started away, and those who remained got too drunk to pass any more laws, when we left for home, breathing freer and deeper . . ." [3]

Miners' meetings were a slipshod way of running the business of a district, but the b'hoys of Alder Gulch didn't care much for guv'ment, a bias which would get them into trouble later, before the year was out.

Other things were chaotic the first month after the staking of the gulch. A forest fire roared up the bottom, charring all of the alders, climbed up the mountainsides, forcing prospectors on adjacent ridges to skedaddle. After the fire, each b'hoy worked in mud and water all day and lay down in ashes and charcoal at night, oblivious to the barrenness around him. The only direction he looked was down—down into the hole he was digging; down where the gold lay, the gold that would see a man wealthy and home this fall.

Into the gulch each day, helter skelter, came more men, old hands at mining and greenhorns who expected to sweep nuggets from the bare ground. The old hands staked their claims after a professional hike over the ground and went to work. The greenhorns swarmed around other men's workings, gawking, popping questions at any head that appeared above ground, hollering questions down shafts at the busy men below. They made one man so irate he noted in his diary on July 29th, "Sunk shaft on bar; surrounded by stampeders, left in disgust at 4 P.M. . . ." [4]

These greenhorns also made life miserable for experienced fortune-hunters by prospecting the prospector. If an old hand headed into the hills with his gold pan, they followed him wherever he went, panning where he panned, camping by him at night so that he might not sneak off. Sometimes a man hiking by himself on other business gathered neophytes, as did the man who spent the day looking for a lost pig, followed by a crowd who were convinced he was leading them to Golconda.

Such simple-mindedness brought soothsayers and spiritualists to the gulch to prey upon the b'hoys. For a fee they would transmogrify novice prospectors into claim-holders—so they said. Diviners led dupes up side gulches where they drove stakes into the first ground over which the forked stick twitched. It was hard for such frauds to fail, for there was some gold everywhere.

On the other hand, old-timers in the Territory (anyone was an old-timer who had been in the area for a year) were sometimes no better off than the newcomers. Some of them had stood aloof from the new stampede. They had followed will-o'-the-wisp rumor before and come back with nothing but sore feet. They were professional miners who could take a stampede or leave it alone, whose attitude was similar to that of the man who wrote in his diary on the day the Fairweather

party left Bannack, "A large crowd left in A.M. for the new 'diggings', supposed to be on Humbug Creek visited by me on 15th August last." [5] He was wrong; he had been on Flint Creek farther north, but he had been to "Humbug Creek" too often to get excited over this latest rumor. When he went to Alder Gulch in late June, he found much of the good ground already staked by greenhorns.

Experienced miners made other bad decisions based on their "superior" knowledge. During the first week of the strike, some of them walked off their claims and left the gulch, stating there was no pay here, because there were few bars in the stream where gold could be deposited.[6] Their pronouncements seemed to be borne out, for men who had staked claims that looked good, which had promised well in the first panning, had not found the big colors expected. The b'hoy who stuck with his digging in blind hope had the better of the professional. Within a week or so, he found that the gold lay just above bedrock in the bed of an old stream which "surpassed in magnitude and the uniform distribution of its golden treasure, any place which has been recorded on this plannet"—as Judge Blake put it in his Fourth of July oration in 1876. Those "experts" who had given up their claims learned too late that "in mining it is better to be lucky than to have the wisdom of Solomon."

When the riches of the place began to fill brand-new pokes, men arrived in the gulch not to mine, but to provide everything for the b'hoys. Along Daylight Creek, just a quarter of a mile below Discovery, on a pre-empted 320-acre townsite, arose wickiup gambling halls and tent stores to cater to the newly rich. The place was to be called Varina City. Judge Bissell's first act as elected representative of Fairweather Mining District was to change the name to Virginia City, muttering that he'd be damned if he'd sign any papers naming a town

after the wife of Jeff Davis. By his highhanded presumption, Virginia City she is to this day.

Though new structures were rising every day in town, up and down the gulch the b'hoys were too busy to bother with building. Most of the claim holders rolled up in their blankets near their diggings, sleeping under the stars throughout the summer months. Others dug shallow caves or erected brush huts for protection against sudden mountain storms. The more hardy slept out until late fall, as did John Grannis who boasted in his diary on October 21st, "Slept under a roof tonight for the first night since leaving California Gulch on the 20th of April." Even so, a roof was about all he had, for he didn't find time to hang a door until December 11th, nor to make a bedstead until a year later. His claim, like many others, was no bonanza which loaded a man with dust before he ever felt need of a bed.

CHAPTER TWO

VIRGINIA CITY, MELTING POT

ALL ROADS NOW LED to Virginia City. Emigrants who had reached Oregon Territory backtracked across the War Department's Mullan Trail from Walla Walla across Mullan Pass and into Hell Gate before heading south through Johnnie Grant's ranch to Alder Gulch. Californians retreated over Donner's Pass and the Humboldt River to Fort Hall, from which they headed directly north for the new stampede. Boatloads of men bound for Bannack City and the Idaho gold fields disembarked at Fort Benton, farthest point of navigation on the Missouri River, and changed their course a few degrees to veer toward Alder Gulch instead of the Grasshopper valley when they heard news of the great strike. Men bound for Oregon left the Oregon Trail at Soda Springs for Virginia City only two hundred miles north.

Emigrants arrived through the light snow of the winter of '63-'64. By spring, the country where only the trapper and the Indian had loned it swarmed with displaced fortune hunters. Supplies were short, but there was lots of game to eat and oxen which had plodded into the Territory ahead of prairie schooners were butchered soon after arrival. Because of

the constant emigration, beef was plentiful and prices were low. Many a pilgrim existed on a straight diet of meat before freight wagons arrived in the spring.

Most of these fortune hunters were young men, youths in their twenties or married men in their early thirties who had left family at home. A few hardy oldsters were in the mountains, but Virginia City was populated by b'hoys.

They had come to a country as young as they, for Idaho Territory had been created only that year. To a few politically minded men, an unorganized Territory was as luring as a paying claim. They saw an empire to be had for the developing and planned to reside here where careers could blossom. They were in the minority, for very few of the b'hoys used the word "home" when they spoke of the gulch. When they spoke of home, they talked of "America," or the "Vaterland," or wherever. To them, the only thing important about the Idaho boundary was that it surrounded gold.

Lewiston was the capital of Idaho Territory, two hundred miles to the west of the new diggings, over mountains almost impassable during winter months (the legislative delegate from this district was gone almost six months traveling to and attending the first legislative session in Lewiston). With thousands of emigrants pouring into the gold fields, the politically ambitious worried about a capital so remote. It seemed to them that there was a need for a new Territory and a new seat of government east of the Continental Divide.

Such a necessity did it appear to these fledgling statesmen that they sent Sidney Edgerton, newly arrived Judge of the Eastern District of Idaho, snowshoeing back across the mountains to Salt Lake City, in the middle of January, 1864, and thence to Washington, D. C. Congress must be convinced that it was impossible to administer the headwaters of the Missouri from the Columbia River drainage.

Edgerton and his backers were strong Union men and

well-acquainted in Washington. There was little difficulty with the bill to create Montana Territory. It was introduced by Congressman James M. Ashley of Ohio (Edgerton's home state). The only argument over the division of Idaho Territory, less than a year old, was that the name Montaña seemed inappropriate. Some Congressmen felt that the name should be of Indian derivation, but no one knew enough about Western Indians to come up with a good name. Ashley claimed the Spanish Montaña was a good name for the mountainous region, so Montaña it became, and so it was spelled until slothfulness dropped the diacritical mark. President Lincoln signed the bill May 26, 1864; Montaña Territory was born; Edgerton hurried homeward with the good news.

At Salt Lake City he learned that he had been appointed Governor of the new Territory. It was up to him to prepare for an election of a Territorial Assembly and decree a temporary meeting place for the Assembly, which would draw up the codes and decide upon a permanent capital city between the aspirants: Bannack, Virginia, and Nevada Cities—the last another Alder Gulch community.

Virginia City was fast outgrowing her competitors for this honor. Stakes had been driven amidst the sagebrush and cactus marking off a main street. Buildings had arisen along the string lines. By early 1864, George P. Dorris had completed a fine two-story adobe building on the corner of what was to become Wallace and Jackson streets, making this the main intersection of town. Anyone who wanted to be located near the center of things built close by. What ninety days before had been worthless sagebrush and cactus and gumbo now sold by the square foot at city prices.

The 320 acres appropriated for the Virginia City townsite lay about equally on either side of Daylight Creek, which empties into Alder Creek some 400 yards down-gulch from

Fairweather's discovery point. Daylight Creek being goldless, her banks were free for use by city planners (although once during this first year the city itself was almost dug up in the belief that the entire hillside was gold-bearing; a day or two of fruitless digging stopped the threatened engulfment of the city). The water trickling down Daylight Gulch was commandeered by livery men who erected corrals and barns along the convenient stream, rendering it as unfit for consumption as Alder Creek. Drinking water had to be purchased, sold by the barrel, hauled into town from the springs which fed Daylight Creek—but only until the enterprising water company completed boring logs for its wooden pipe line which would service Wallace Street before the end of '64.

Wallace Street became the main thoroughfare. It paralleled Daylight Creek, a fastidious block uphill of its odoriferous, noisy, fly-infested corrals. Running uphill as well as tilting sideways downhill toward Daylight Creek, its boardwalks on the downhill side are some three feet lower than uphill walks. This slant also makes one-story buildings on the lower side of the street reach down two stories at the alley—which created a necessity for the famous two-story outdoor privies behind them, a marvel of Chic Sale plumbing.

Other "cities" were built along Alder Creek, but Virginia City was the hub of the gulch. Below it were smaller trading centers: Junction, at the joining of Granite and Alder Creeks, four miles down the gulch; Adobetown, a mile or so closer; then Nevada City, oldest town on the creek, but overshadowed by her younger and bigger sister a mile away; lastly, Central City, so close as to be suburbia. Above Virginia City were Summit, near the head of the gulch, Pine Grove and Highland close by. An estimated 1500 to 2000 cabins filled the gaps between towns, standing so close that one man wrote: "the road connecting all these 'cities' is bordered with dwellings, on both sides all along." [1]

At night, as far up and down the gulch as the eye could see, lights twinkled through the make-shift, oiled-paper windowpanes of the tiny cabins, or spilled out into the gulch through open doors. It was a lively scene, belying the drab wilderness and crude buildings hidden in the darkness. It was a sight not to be forgotten by men lonely for civilization. Judge Blake, early-day editor and barrister, remembered it well in 1876: "If a stranger entered the gulch in the prosperous days of 1863 and 1864, and traveled from Junction to Summit [about ten miles], the brilliant lights, illuminating the road and trail, would dazzle his eyes, and cause him to imagine he was in a vast city." [2]

By day, there was little natural beauty in the townsite—in fact, a more unpleasant place would have been hard to find. The greater part of the town lies on the slope of the hill jutting between Alder and Daylight Creeks. A barren, rocky, sagebrush- and cactus-covered promontory, it is so situated that little of the surrounding beautiful mountain country can be viewed from it. Half of the horizon was barren; early photos show only sparse juniper clumps breaking the monotony of the other half. The soil that exists is the gumbo kind that, when wet, balls up underfoot and makes balloon tires on wagon rims—and is oil-slick in addition. A most cantankerous place to build, but the gold miner had little choice.

Trees that might have softened the bleakness were gone, fed into the saws of local mills, converted into timbers and rough planking for crude buildings and sluice boxes, used as logs for cabins. There was no beauty to be seen from any spot in the camp. The gulch itself was everywhere turned over, scored, washed, lying in ugly heaps, "as if an enormous hog had been uprooting the soil." The placer miner, of all miners, leaves the worst mess behind him.

The b'hoys themselves were as unkempt as their town. Some Sundays they did laundry, but scrubbing hickory shirts

and jeans was easily postponed if there was racin' or fightin' or other doin's in town. Durn work clothes were mud-plastered after two minutes' mucking anyway. As for good clothes, dirt floors and no sidewalks fixed them in the same hurry.

Clothes were catch as catch can, bits and pieces of various outfits thrown together. An occasional remnant of Union blue was worn by some of the b'hoys; more often was seen the Confederate gray; either uniform in such a condition as never to pass another inspection.

There was little point in brushing hair, trimming beards or changing collars in this wilderness camp. Washing hands and face was all right, if a man had soap, but as for a bath—it was rare enough to confide to diary: "Had a good wash all over tonight." [3] It was a man's world, and if a man hated dish-washing, he soon learned to fry an egg on a piece of paper, eat it from the same paper, and toss it away when he was through.

Yet for all its roughness and its squalor, the place was Wonderland to the gangling b'hoy from Pike County. In the first place the camp was polyglot; he heard the gabbling of several foreign tongues all around him. He puzzled over the broken English that was hurled at him: the exasperating heaviness of the German, the strange rhythms of the Russian and Polack, the good-natured mispronunciations of the Swedes, Norwegians and Danes. He laughed to watch French-Canadians and immigrant Frenchmen wave expressive hands at each other in growing irritation at the others' awful language. To his surprise he found he could scarcely understand the lilt of the Lancashire man or the delightful burr of the Scotchman, and the Welshman spoke a foreign language as far as he was concerned.

The young Missourian could become a little cosmopolitan just through his daily contacts about the town. He might chop wood next to a Dubliner during the day, eat supper at the

Star Restaurant with a Mexican, and in the evening sit among the Germans at Mannheim's Brewery to hear stories and songs of the Vaterland. He saw German newspapers, French newspapers, Russian newspapers. Later on, in '65, in the gambling dens of Chinatown, he watched the strange magic of the abacus, saw an occasional Chinese making the swift brush strokes of his cabalistic writing. His eyes popped at this; it was as if a teen-ager of today met up with a man from Mars. Every day the young adventurer was forced to translate any dialect that might be jabbered at him; he became something of a grammarian as he helped foreign friends through the intricacies of the camp's Americanese; apt foreign oaths occasionally came to his own tongue.

Such was the population of the mining camp which called herself the Queen City of the Territory, and aspired to be its capital. This was the populace which Mr. Edgerton was to weld into a Territory loyal to the Union.

He had his work cut out for him, because, of the native-born gold-seekers, a slight majority were Confederate sympathizers. The largest group of them was from Missouri, dubbed "the left wing of Price's Army" because they had *left* it far behind, and because they were far to the left of it. Kentuckians and Virginians were also numerous. New York State and Pennsylvania furnished the two largest groups of Union men, with Ohioans, Indianans and Illinoisans also plentiful.[4]

The two groups disliked sharing the same gulch and using the same streets. Many of the men on both sides were veterans who had served their hitch or had been discharged because of wounds or sickness. Their feelings were sore against men who had so recently been shooting at them. They were a long way from the shooting, so they tried to get along, but the effort rankled in many a heart, and when a

newspaper, *The Montana Post,* started up in August of '64, one man spoke his feelings in a letter to the editor:

> . . . It is very true, that in our commingling together as neighbors and fellow-citizens, and in our business relations, we need not go constantly about obtruding our feelings upon those who may deem them obnoxious; but should we care nothing whether men are patriots or traitors . . . ?[5]

This smoldering animosity sometimes broke into flames when alcohol was poured into it. Howling riders sometimes galloped past Governor Edgerton's house in Bannack, firing at the Union flag flying there. A yarn still heard about this little Civil War is that in Nevada City on July 4, 1864 some b'hoys in gray struck the Union flag early in the morning. Northerners procured another flag and had it fluttering in the breeze after some scuffling. The Southerners then succeeded in chopping down the flagpole. The affair developed into a free-for-all—but Union forces won the day, mended the pole and flew Old Glory again—according to the story.

Union men had the ear of the United States Congress, of course, and *The Montana Post,* the only newspaper in town for some time, was strongly Union in sentiment. Confederates had difficulty making themselves heard, except at voting, when their majority spoke, and at rumor-mongering. News of the war was hard to obtain, for mail from the States arrived in town three months after it had been postmarked, if it arrived at all. The Confederate majority kept the Union b'hoys stirred up with all sorts of malicious rumors, which there was no way to prove wrong. Though the Northerners labeled any rumor as coming from "Dr. Glick's Grapevine Telegraph," they couldn't help feel disturbed at the persistent story that Washington, D. C. was captured and

Lincoln held prisoner-of-war. They wrote letters home pleading for the truth:

> . . . They tell pretty hard stories here about the war. They represent that Gen Grant has been badly defeated at Richmond and the [sic] Washington is surrounded by Gen Lee and that Illinois and Indiana have seceded from the Union and have joined the Southern confederacy. They tell this as a fact. We get no papers here so we do not know what to think about it. Write soon and let me know the whole particulars. . . .[6]

Bloodshed was near several times. Once the men of a wagon train on the way to Virginia City, Yankees and Confederates traveling together, had a falling out and almost fought the farthest west battle of the Civil War, before their women stepped between the readied rifles.[7] N. P. Langford, in Bannack one time, "had seen a Secesh flag flying, and men standing by with revolvers, daring any bystander to say that he did'ent like to see that flag or that he did'ent support Jeff Davis." [8]

Strife was present at any public meeting. At the theater, each side showed its prejudice by responding to the orchestra's rendition of "Dixie" or "Yankee Doodle" by firing their revolvers through the ceiling. At a school recital, "Seceshes" called for Southern tunes from the pupils; when they were refused, the Southerners abstained from applause for any number. Seemingly, the only time the two groups ever got along in public during the early days of Virginia City was when fire companies made up of Yankees and Johnnie Rebs marched together to the tunes of "Yankee Doodle" or "Dixie" with no fighting.

Somehow, the two groups lived together in this isolated

town, where there was no law, and where firearms were carried by all, without a pitched battle, although hatreds ran so deep that after the death of President Lincoln the following note was posted on the door of the Prickly Pear Agency of that enemy newspaper, *The Montana Post:*

> Glory enough for one time!
> Old Abe has gone to Hell!
> Hurrah for Jeff Davis!
> Grand Reception of Old Abe in Hell!
> Big Dinner!
> The Devil's Band played "Welcome the Chief!" [9]

In Virginia City, little Southern girls at a party danced around and around the room cheering the death of Lincoln.

The violently pro-Union *Post* had done little to reconcile the difficulties. Its policy was to ignite any oil poured on troubled waters, and at war's end, printed the following item:

> MISSING.—Lost, mislaid, stolen or strayed, a man named Jeff. Davis. He had lately sold his furniture, owing to the failure of some speculative scheme in which he had embarked. It is thought he headed for Havana, intending to try the cigar business—all his projects having hitherto ended in smoke. Any person giving information of his whereabouts, will receive a Major-General's commission in the Southern army and a cord of Confederated scrip.[10]

These sentiments of the *Post* may have expressed Governor Edgerton's feelings, but they did little to help him govern the Territory. The tensions of the conflict between the states, magnified by this local, outspoken bitterness, left this able man in charge of a Territory pulling against itself. He could do nothing right in the eyes of the Southerners and nothing

wrong in the eyes of the Northerners. Consequently, all political questions became related to the larger argument, too often to the detriment of local interests.

Cohesion in local matters was made even more difficult by the large alien population. The Irish outnumbered any other group of white emigrants. Their fiercely independent Fenian Society, a group to be reckoned with, was wooed by both sides. Thomas Dimsdale, first editor of the *Post*, English by birth and education and culture, took care never to ruffle an Irish temper on the question of Irish independence. He and the other Unionists in town were irritated by England's attitude toward the rebellion, and felt it would serve her Majesty right if the Irish did slap her face. Other emigrant groups, the German being the next largest, were somewhat apart from these schisms of loyalties, creating further difficulties.

Virginia City, during the first year of her existence, was, then, like a beehive without a Queen Bee, every occupant intent on his own business, ready to sting any other bee that got in his way, his one thought to get as much honey for himself as possible.

Yet in spite of this lack of community feeling, the place grew and began to resemble a town. Some families with children arrived, making it possible for the precise little Englishman, T. J. Dimsdale, to add a Professor to his name and open a log school house on the side of cemetery hill.

Stagecoaches were running from Bannack and back every day as well as to and from Salt Lake City when they could make it. The town as yet afforded no hotels for their passengers. Transients spread their bed rolls on the floors and counters of friendly mercantile stores, road agent next to judge, drunkard next to preacher. Other buildings were scarce, also, and the overflow of merchants and professional men caused much doubling up, storekeepers with different lines of

merchandise sharing one building, lawyers and doctors moving their offices in on top of them. Some of these stores did further duty serving as meeting places for gregarious, intelligent men who liked to chew over the latest topics of the day but had no hotel lobbies to pass the time in, the saloons being too rowdy for serious talk. Storekeepers such as Pfouts and Russell or King and Gillette opened their doors after hours to all who enjoyed sensible talk.

But those who had "got all they wanted" weren't about to sit around a general store in a dumpy mining camp all winter with their pokes bulging with gold. They had what they had come for and itched to get home with it. Throughout the fall they left the town headed for the States. More than a hundred of them didn't make it out of the mountains, part of them failing to show up in Bannack only seventy-five miles away. They were murdered for their gold. For while they had been neglecting all else in their fever to get it and get out, others had been putting in considerable time planning how to get it away from them before they got out.

CHAPTER THREE

THE "INNOCENTS"

HENRY PLUMMER spurred his horse out of Alder Gulch, riding for Bannack. He had looked over the new diggings here and he was chortling to himself at what he had seen. This new strike expanded all his plans a thousand-fold. Not that he was a placer miner; no, silver-quartz lodes were more in his line, so he said. But if this Alder Gulch proved out, it would increase the wealth and the population in this country more than he had dreamed when he had come here less than a year ago. Not that he was a business-man; his shiny new badge, just pinned to his vest the 24th of May, proclaimed him Sheriff.

Plummer liked it in Idaho Territory. It was a most suitable place for one of his nature; the best thing he had found in his wanderings through the West, which had taken him from California, through Nevada, north through Oregon Territory and east into the Salmon River country, before he had saddled for Bannack.

He was popular with the b'hoys. True, they had yammered for a while about hanging him for murder last January, but had acquitted him in miners' court, and the same bunch

had elected him sheriff, for he had told them they needed a man as expert with a revolver as he was. He boasted he could draw and fire five shots in three seconds, and he was considered the fastest shot in the mountains. His gun had killed five men before he had arrived in these parts, but the b'hoys didn't know that.

He jogged along at a good clip, for he was anxious to get home to his new bride. A schoolm'arm she was, from the Sun River Country. He had married her over the tears and fears and objections of her sister. Henry smiled to himself. He was getting what he wanted. His manners were good; his looks were good, and he kept himself cleaner and neater than the hobbledehoys about him; he had schooling enough to make him friends with the bigwigs. He might make an honest way of it in the Idaho gold fields, if honesty would only pay.

Yet, something kept him following the wheel tracks in the new-green grass, the fresh tracks of Oliver & Company's stagecoach, making the trail that would become the road over which thousands of miners would have to tote thousands of dollars in gold dust. Henry's eyes were busy to the side of the trail, also, seeking places for ambushes and holdups, for Plummer, the new Sheriff, could work both sides of the street. He had been banded with outlaws engaged in robbery and theft all winter. He had served a term in the penitentiary in California for his criminal activities. He had a chance to go straight, now—but this lonesome trail, in a land where there was no law but him, along which a fortune in gold was about to travel, was very tempting.

Plummer's resistance to such temptation lasted little longer than it took him to ride to Bannack: members of his road-agent gang began working the road from Alder Gulch soon after the strike there. George Ives set up a corral and stock ranche in the Stinkingwater Valley, where he boarded emigrant stock and from which he could raid the road. (It was

a lucrative business in itself, for an animal was nothing but a nuisance that kept the busy miner from his claim, and the merchant or saloon owner found the three dollars a month or so paid for boarding an animal on a ranche much preferable to the ten dollars a day charged by a livery stable.) Another member of the gang, Club Foot George Lane, ostensibly a shoemaker, rented space in Dance and Stuart's store for his cobbler's bench and used it as a listening post to inform Ives which voyagers from Virginia City were worth plundering.

Plummer by this time had organized his road agents into a neatly functioning gang of about fifty. Working in cahoots, the robbers were able to infiltrate each mining camp with spies such as Club Foot George, who noted which miner had made his pile and when he was heading for home. They held regular meetings, most often at Rattlesnake Ranche, but sometimes at Dempsey's Cottonwood Ranche, or at Daly's on Ramshorn Creek. They used a password, "I Am Innocent," tied their neckerchiefs in a distinctive knot, and shaved down to a mustache and goatee. They marked treasure coaches before they left town, so that they might be known on the road, and often arranged to have a gang member on the coach who might sing or whistle if it was dangerous to attack. They kept up a constant communication with each other. Their organization was a little reminiscent of opera bouffé, but they used real bullets.

Plummer had enlisted this crew from the job-lot of thugs who hung out in Cyrus Skinner's saloon in Bannack. This little, low-ceilinged, log shebang boasted a bar lined with roughs who had come to the Grasshopper with robbery in mind. Most of them had been drifting in this direction for some time, moving ahead of posses and WANTED posters, seeking country less frequented by law men. Drinking at Skinner's, Plummer met Whisky Bill Graves, George Ives, Bill Hunter, Hays (Haze) Lyon, Frank Parrish, Ned Ray, William

Moore, Charlie Reeves, and a veritable Sweeney Todd of a barber, Buck Stinson.

Any one of this ornery gang would have shot a man for the price of a good drunk; they shot at each other for less reason. George Ives was wounded in a gun duel with Carrhart, a fellow ruffian. Carrhart was later killed while asleep in a backroom of Goodrich's Saloon by a stray bullet from a traditional shooting bout between two poker players. Moore and Reeves promptly got into this affray as friends of the mortally wounded Carrhart. They shot one of the poker players in the finger before he dodged out the door, then, just for the hell of it, they fired promiscuously into the rapidly fleeing crowd. These shots wounded two men, one of whom died later.

Earlier, Moore and Reeves and a man named Mitchell had poured two separate volleys of shots into a tepee of friendly Bannock Indians camped in town, killing three of them, as well as a Frenchman who had run up to investigate the shooting.

All of this gunfire caused "but little if any excitement" amongst the b'hoys in Bannack. Each man went about town heeled with Navy Colt, derringer, shotgun or rifle, not asking for trouble but intending to take care of himself. Expecting to be long gone from these parts in a few months, he could see little point in wasting time trying to ride herd on a bunch of roughs. He felt that "if the Shooting was left entirely to the Pimps there would Be very little harm Done." [1]

Little harm was done while the pimps were shooting at each other, for most of Plummer's gang were not the expert gunmen they imagined they were. For instance, George Ives, the murderer of many men, succeeded in emptying his gun at Carrhart without wounding his adversary. In turn, Carrhart, with one shot left and with Ives's retreating back in his sights, only wounded Ives. (He himself then fled down the street before Ives could find another gun.) Moore and Reeves were

able to hit targets such as a tepee full of people or a swinging door full of fleeing men, but when shooting it out with a poker player at close range, nicked his finger by accident. Plummer, for all his vaunted speed—which, incidentally, was made to look slow by later records—was not a particularly accurate shooter, if he can be judged by his one gun fight at Bannack, in which he managed to kill Jack Cleveland. In this saloon duel, he fired four shots at Cleveland at close range. The first shot lodged in a beam over Cleveland's head, the second ricocheted from his ribs, the third entered his head through the eye, and the fourth plowed into the log wall between two seated men. During all this time, Cleveland had not succeeded in drawing his gun.

These men were not the gunslicks of Western fiction. They were ordinary saloon goons, who, by their numbers and their tactics, were to wage a successful gang warfare, but their favorite method of fighting would be the bushwhack, and their favorite weapon a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun, each barrel loaded with a dozen revolver balls. Revolvers they liked to use only at point-blank range—say, held in a holdup victim's ear.

Still, they had the advantage in any encounter with a lone traveler, armed and determined to defend himself and his gold though he was. In the first place, though he might have a chance to draw, the b'hoy with gun in hand was at a disadvantage: he had been too busy mining to practice with the tricky thing; chances were good that a cap might misfire, for he tended to load it and then forget about it for months; chances were, also, that if it fired, the powder might be so poorly loaded the ball would not penetrate. The road agents dealt with him pretty much as they pleased, when they surprised him on a lonely road.

Henry Plummer was able to direct the talent the Bannack renegades had for robbery and killing into a profitable road-

agent venture because of the strike in Alder Gulch. There had not been much plunder in Bannack during the winter of '62-'63. The gang had robbed the Walla Walla coach, burglarized a store or two, and held up straggling winter travelers—enough take for tobacco money. It may be that Plummer was finding honesty more profitable than crime by May of '63; he might have attempted to go straight, for the sake of his new bride, if the riches of Alder Gulch had not multiplied by many times what he had estimated the booty would be. With the gang at hand, it was his for the taking.

By fall it was extremely dangerous for any b'hoy to try to pack his gold home, for George Ives made the Bannack-Virginia City Road a seventy-five-mile ambuscade. The man was everywhere. Victims of the road agents later testified that it was Ives who popped out of the willows and snatched their pokes, that it was Ives who had forced them out of the coach and stripped them of their valuables, that it was Ives who had attempted to murder them. Plummer directed operations from the centrally located Bannack, from there he could dispatch men to raid the Salt Lake City roads and keep an eye on the Stinkingwater Road as well, but it was bloodthirsty George Ives who murdered enough men to make the business pay.

Ives didn't mind killing a man for his gold, and, after stopping a few travelers who thought they would outwit him by carrying no gold, he killed them for that, too. Lucky Anton Holter, proprietor of the White Pine Lumber Company in Virginia City, was shot at point-blank range by Ives for neglecting to bring enough gold to make this holdup worth the bandit's time. The first shot punctured Holter's hat and powdermarked him for life. The second shot Ives aimed deliberately in his face, but the cap misfired. Holter escaped and galloped home, "blessing the cap-maker."

Stagecoaches made unscheduled stops in heed to Ives's

shouted "Halt, you sons of bitches." The passengers, looking down the double barrels of road-agent guns, agreed one and all that they would have preferred "a side view of the operation." Anna Skaggs, well-known madam in camp, tried to get home with the wages of sin her girls had earned for her. The coach she was on was stopped, and she had to come back to "work" again. "Bummer Dan" McFadden sneaked out of Virginia City and boarded the coach at Dempsey's ranch on down the road, carrying over $2,000 in gold in pokes strapped to his body under his clothes. The ruse didn't work; the coach was stopped, and he was forced to drop his pants in the blustering cold, while the road agents searched and robbed him.

Soon after Fairweather Mining District was formed, Plummer became the Sheriff of it as well as of Bannack Mining District, replacing Buzz Caven, who had served only a few days. Now, as lawman, he could advise the b'hoys how to transport their gold, and as head of the road agents he could plan just where to take it away from them; as lawman, he heard any testimony from victims, and as head of the road agents, he ordered the execution of anyone who knew too much. Murder became an almost daily occurrence, and George Ives, sure of the protection of "the law," killed without attempting alibi or disguise, once shooting a man who had informed on the gang in broad daylight in the sight of a wagon train.

Sheriff Plummer was seen more often on the streets of Virginia City and even joined in the gunplay. Soon the infant mining camp had to have a hospital, a convalescent home for victims of gunshot wounds. Colonel W. F. Sanders, nephew of Judge Edgerton, visited there one day as the guest of Sheriff Plummer, who led him past the beds of unconscious patients, pointing with pride to the ones who were the results

of his own marksmanship, unaware that Sanders suspected him of being a road agent.[2]

Virginia City suffered the same infestation of criminals as had Bannack City the year before. Plummer appointed three members of his gang, Ned Ray, Buck Stinson and Jack Gallagher, as his deputies in Alder Gulch. Virginia City was an occupied town which Plummer "ruled with a rod of iron." Somehow his chief deputy, a man named Dillingham, was honest. When he learned of the plans of the other three deputies to rob a traveler, he warned the prospective victim of his danger, a foolhardy action, for the man soon blabbed of his narrow escape to every one, all but signing Dillingham's death warrant.

On June 30, 1863, less than four weeks after Alder Gulch had opened, the gang executed him by revolver shots (after closing in to make sure of their marksmanship), as he stood on the outskirts of a miner's civil trial in progress. He was killed by shots from three gunmen firing in unison, Hays Lyon, Buck Stinson, and Charlie Forbes. As prearranged, Jack Gallagher rushed in to arrest them, seizing their weapons; later on he managed to reload one revolver, so that no one would be able to tell who fired the fatal shot.

Dillingham was still warm when the cocksure trio stood, flabbergasted, in miners' court, on trial for their lives. They had chosen a bad time for murder, what with a crowd of serious miners on hand, and a judge already holding court. Some of the b'hoys had begun to realize that the pimps were not shooting at each other any more, but were shooting at them. Now was a good time to get in a few licks of their own. Recognizing this, they were smart enough to decide upon a jury of the whole instead of twelve selectmen who would be chosen in part by a sheriff friendly toward his own deputies. They put three men on the judge's bench, incarcerated Forbes

in a log building under guard, and proceeded with the trial of Stinson and Lyon in an open-air courtroom at the foot of what would become Wallace Street. Dillingham's body lay on a gambler's table in a wikiup casino near by.

The trial took the rest of the afternoon, recessed over night, and continued the next morning. By noon, Stinson and Lyon had been found guilty and had been sentenced to hang, and men had been despatched to build a gallows and dig graves. Charlie Forbes was brought from the temporary jail house, and his trial proceeded while the preparations for execution went on.

Forbes was a handsome man, well-educated, possessing a command of language which neither of his predecessors had. An appealing figure in the dock, he made his own eloquent petition to the crowd with such ability that they let him off, though he was a known gunman, of equal ability to Plummer, perhaps, who wore his gun always in position for a quick draw. His appeal might not have been so effective if he had been tried first, but by this time the b'hoys' attention was beginning to wander. Many had left the trial grounds, while others were anxious to get to the more exciting business of hanging their two birds-in-hand.

The condemned men were loaded into a wagon to be transported to the gallows. From this rude tumbril, parked in front of the improvised jail, Hays Lyon entreated the crowd, promising to be good if let off this time, weeping as he spoke. This pitiful spectacle moved the hearts of the women in the crowd, who in turn implored the b'hoys for mercy. The upshot was a new vote on their sentence, by ayes and nays, which resulted in both sides claiming victory. Another voting system was tried, those for hanging going uphill a way, those against moving downhill. Though the acquittal group swore they were the majority, the uphill men would not agree, and confusion boiled about the wagon. A third attempt at voting, by

having those for and against execution file between two vote-counters, ended in further argument when the ayes accused the nays of voting more than one time per man.

Jack Gallagher, pistol in hand, took advantage of the indecision, led an Indian pony he had appropriated to the wagon, declared the men freed and sent them, double-mounted, galloping on their way before anyone got up gumption enough to stop them.

Once again, good intentions had bogged down in wavering indecision. The miners' court, without accepted procedure and form to guide it, had proved too unwieldy to be an effective deterrent to frontier crime.

This latest failure of justice convinced Plummer that he could trample upon the b'hoys as he pleased, that they would never climb out of the diggings long enough to harm him. They were gullible innocents who could never believe that the smile on the sheriff's face came from swallowing gilded miners. They were simpletons who had believed in him when he had tesified in miners' court that he had killed Cleveland because the man had "belonged to Watkin's band in California and who had pursued Plummer for purpose of taking his life, said Plummer having served as an officer in California, to the detriment of said Watkin's schemes." [3] They were dolts who, after condemning Moore and Reeves to banishment from Bannack, for the tepee murders, giving them three hours to leave town and telling them not to stop moving until they were 600 miles away, allowed the two to hole up in near-by Deer Lodge, and shortly became so soft-headed as to rescind the sentence altogether.

Plummer smiled and smiled during that year of '63. He could handle the b'hoys, and he was getting in with the right people, fooling them as well. But he couldn't fool his wife; she discovered her mistake very soon and fled home to Wisconsin, ostensibly for a visit. Nor could he fool wide-awake

men, the men who were of some account, the men he liked to be with, the men who were wondering about the coincidences of the sheriff's absences "looking over silver leads" and certain highway robberies.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE VIGILANTES

IN MID-DECEMBER of 1863, a hunter dropped a grouse in the sagebrush foothills of the Ramshorn Mountains (the Tobacco Root Mountains today). His young son found the bird plummeted onto a human corpse, a bullet through its head. The hunter, William Palmer, walked to a nearby wikiup with the news, and there requested its two occupants to help him load the body into his wagon. The pair, Long John Franck and George Hilderman, refused to leave their hut for any dead body.

"There's lots of dead bodies about," Long John pointed out. "They kill men every day in Virginia City, and nobody pays it no mind."

Palmer hiked back to his wagon, managed to load the frozen corpse into it and to fetch the body to Nevada City. There it was identified as that of Nichola Tbalt, popular young German who had been missing for ten days. The remains lay in the open wagon for half a day, all the b'hoys, idled by the winter freeze-up, coming to hang chins over the wagon box and gawk at the awkward, frozen body, but remaining to clench fists and swear vengeance on his killer. The

toughs hung about, also, sneering at the excitement, interrupting Palmer's oft-told story with "Where'd you make the find?", "Did you get color?" or "How much does it pay?" [1]

Then somebody remembered that Tbalt had last been seen heading for Ives's ranch to pick up a team of mules he had sold, the money from the sale still in his pocket. Somebody else thought it a mighty good idea to investigate the occupants of that wikiup so suspiciously close to the body. By nightfall a posse of twenty-five men were preparing to ride in Tbalt's revenge.

The following morning at dawn the posse captured three of the inmates of the makeshift abode, George Ives, Long John Franck, and "Tex." They nabbed George Hilderman as they rode home. The prisoners were brought to Nevada City, surrounded by guards who rode along singing, jesting with George Ives and racing their mounts—almost losing Ives in a race when his horse proved faster than theirs. Ives bought a drink all around at one stop. This lively break in the winter's monotony closed inharmoniously when the prisoners were chained up in a makeshift calaboose.

When the news spread that Ives was arrested, a strategy meeting of Alder Gulch road agents despatched Clubfoot George on a midnight ride to Bannack and Henry Plummer with the bad tidings. It also gathered defense counsel for their compatriots, made up of nearly all the resident lawyers in Virginia City, Messrs. Smith, Thurmond, Ritchie and Davis.

There was a lot of wrangling amongst the b'hoys over the question of where Ives should be tried, Nevada City or Virginia City. The toughs wanted the trial in Virginia City were Plummer would empanel the jury. The posse demanded the trial for Nevada City. So it was decided. After all it was their corpse and their prisoner.

They asked Colonel W. F. Sanders, visiting from Ban-

nack, to act as prosecutor, though he was a stranger to most of them. They chose better than they knew, for the twenty-nine-year-old Sanders was an accomplished lawyer, and, more important, he wasn't afraid of any road agent or of his growling friends. He could outbluff them, outtalk them, and outthink them. And, what was more, he knew how to handle the b'hoys even better than Plummer did. He had a hot temper and a tongue that could blister and when action was necessary he could grab a gun as fast as the next man. (He carried a loaded revolver in his coat pocket throughout the trial.) He was determined to convict Ives, and he had a plan for doing so. He was ably assisted by Charles S. Bagg, a sloppy, earthy miner and lawyer, who was profane enough to be understood by all the b'hoys.

Judge Don L. Byam presided at the trial, assisted by Judge Wilson of Junction Mining District (the trial should have been held at Junction, nearest district to the murder spot, but Junction wasn't organized sufficiently to handle it). The judges and lawyers were on hand the morning of December 19th, the day after Ives's arrest, ready to start the proceedings. The b'hoys were also about, since walking was easy in the skift of snow and since this much excitement was hard to come by in these parts. Before mid-morning the frozen, rutted mud of Nevada City's main street was being trampled by 1500 miners who had come from all the districts of the gulch to have a go at trying a man for murder. By noon they had shouted their way to several decisions: that they would vote en masse upon Ives's fate at the end of the trial, but would have an advisory jury of twenty-four men, twelve from Junction and twelve from Nevada; that counsel would be allowed the prisoners; that Ives would be tried first and alone.

Two wagons served as judge's bench and witness box. Twenty-four chairs from a near-by hurdy-gurdy house seated

the jury. Between the jury and the highly excited, well-armed crowd, stood a line of guards headed by James Williams. A huge fire was kept roaring near the wagons, burning cord-wood appropriated from an unlucky wood-chopper's handy pile.

The trial continued through the greater part of three days, halting at times to rout voters out of near-by saloons in order to dispose of an objection made by the defense—which they always voted "overruled" before tromping back to saloon-warmth again. Those who stood about the wagons, stomping chilled feet, shouted suggestions to Sanders or yelled questions directly at a witness when the cross-questioning didn't suit them. Little boys played tag in and out of the crowd. The toughs barked threats at outspoken witnesses and tried to disrupt the proceedings with hubbub, but Judges Byam and Wilson pounded them down, and Williams's armed guards curbed any roughhousing by leveling cocked guns.

Williams did as much as any man to keep this trial from becoming a fiasco. He believed fiercely in democratic rule; he was prepared to live by it and to see that others complied. He could shut up an uncooperative tough, howling down a group decision, by ambling easily over to the fellow, staring coldly and saying firmly, "We're gonna do it our way." His presence here lent assurance to hesitant witnesses. His grit gave heart to his own men as they stood guard each night, protecting witnesses, judges and all, watching for any attempt to free the prisoners.

Ives and his friends expected Plummer to appear in his sheriff's role at any time to break up the trial and claim the prisoner as legally belonging to him. If he didn't arrive in his sheriff's costume, then they thought he would surely come at night with his neckerchief tied in the road agent's knot, to lead a jail delivery. They had mistaken Plummer's brag for

his guts. He was in Bannack, fearfully saving his own skin. He scented danger. As far as he was concerned, the b'hoys, by hanging Ives, would be ridding the gang of a man both he and the others were afraid of.

Sanders developed the trial into a proceeding to adjudge Ives's general guilt as a road agent and murderer rather than to determine if he had murdered Tbalt. Much evidence was admitted by the judges and by the b'hoys as to his former crimes: they took depositions from stage drivers who had been held up by him and from others who definitely identified him as a murderer and robber. But for this evidence, he might have been let off, for the only direct statement coming forth which linked Ives to Tbalt's death was Long John's word that Ives had told him he did it.

Ives's defense was particularly bad. Alibis prepared for him by two disreputable witnesses were knocked into a cocked hat when Sanders and the b'hoys established the pair as being untrustworthy. Much of his counsel's tactics was designed merely to disrupt the trial or to adjourn it and was not a real defense. During the crucial last day of the trial, one of his lawyers was so drunk he could barely function. Protracted, pointless arguing was the result of most of their objections, and their cross-questioning was comprised of attempts to excite the crowd against the witnesses, especially Long John.

Such bickering tried the patience of the b'hoys, and on the morning of the third day, they informed the court that the whole shebang must be adjourned by three o'clock that afternoon.

It was a little later than that when the lawyers finished summing up, for it was dark by the time the jury, after a half hour's deliberation, returned a verdict of guilty, twenty-three to one. The lone dissident, Henry Spivey, said he could not vote for conviction because he didn't believe the evidence

showed Ives to be guilty of Tbalt's murder, which was the specific charge against him.[2]

Sanders was ready for the verdict. He had packed the court this afternoon with men who would support a guilty verdict. Before the jury had been sent out, he had fired a note to John Creighton in Virginia City "telling him that the crisis had finally arrived and asking him to bring with him all the good men he could find, and remain till the end." [3] Sanders was taking no chances on this miners' meeting becoming wishy-washy at the final moment. He had a packed court and he used it, rising to his feet the moment the crowd heard the jury's verdict, asking for a vote upon it. The crowd upheld the jury. Ives's lawyers, confused for the moment, were totally unprepared for Sanders's next motion, that George Ives be immediately hanged by the neck until dead. Judge Byam as quickly put the motion, and the crowd voted it should be done. Ives and his lawyers seemed barely aware of what had transpired. Darkness had fallen, and they evidently had expected sentencing and execution to be carried over till the next day.

The Sheriff of Nevada District and his deputies were instructed to find a place for the execution. As they went off into the dark, Ives, no longer leaving his fate in the hands of his lawyers, made a direct appeal to the emotions of the crowd. Simply, straightforwardly, he came to the wagon where Sanders was and in a clear voice which rang with sincerity (and carried well) asked to be allowed until next morning to write letters home. This appeal Sanders had three days ago made up his mind to refuse, but Ives, clinging to the Colonel's hand, might have swayed the sentimental b'hoys had not a voice from a near-by rooftop cut through the bathos of the scene, "Sanders, ask him how long he gave the Dutchman." It was the voice of short, cocky X. Beidler, who had spent his thirty-three years getting into the middle of excitements like this and

wasn't about to be gulled by such histrionics. The b'hoys laughed at his quip, and Sanders quickly told Ives to write now, for it was his only chance. In later years, X. could always count on the Colonel's friendship and generosity.

In less than an hour after he was declared guilty, Ives was standing atop a five-foot packing box, a hangman's noose around his neck, the dangling end of a rope dropped from a beam thrust out from an unfinished building. From his rickety, elevated perch, he saw the reflection from the hundreds of bearded faces turned toward him, lighted by flickering firelight and cool moonlight. There were no friendly faces close by, for some of his partners had made tracks after hearing testimony implicating themselves in his crimes, and his acquaintances, the gamblers, the saloonkeepers and the bummers, stood back in the shadowy fringes of the crowd, only the drunkest of them brave enough to howl the comforting "I'll shoot the murdering souls" which fell upon his ears. Some of these he could hear weeping drunken tears for their friend.

Judge Byam's voice asked him the question he had hoped never to hear:

"Do you have any last words?"

The crowd was hushed. The reply rang out clearly:

"I am innocent of this crime. Alex Carter killed the Dutchman."

With that the packing box was kicked from under him and he made his drop. The last sounds he heard may have seemed like the hoped-for jail delivery arriving too late, but it was only his friends, with the courage of despair, ineffectively rushing the jail-house to execute Long John and Hilderman in company with Ives. The sounds could have given him little hope, for he had already seen the crowd fall back under the leveling of the guards' rifles after the order, "Men, do your duty."

Ives's neck was broken so that he died instantly, but he

was left swaying from the beam for about an hour just to make sure. He was buried next to his victim, Tbalt.

Hilderman, Long John, and Tex were tried the next day. Hilderman was banished, with every man in the Territory authorized to shoot him on sight if he still was around on New Year's Day, only ten days off. Long John was freed, having purchased immunity with his testimony; Tex was freed because there was nothing against him.

This battle was won, but the war had yet to be fought. How, still had to be determined. Three days' time of a thousand men could be counted on once in a while when fevers were high and novelty drew the curious and when winter doldrums were upon the gulch. But could such cooperation be counted on from the transient, irresponsible b'hoy who was here first and foremost to get rich, who expected to leave the Territory and its borrowed trouble behind in a few months? Without his attendance at trials, a quorum of blackguards would be sure to appear and control things.

Furthermore, could the necessary armed guards be found to protect the personnel and proceedings of the people's court from intimidation, beating, or killing over a period of months of prosecutions? It was doubtful. Why, right now it was taking the time of over one hundred men just to look after Sanders and the others.

What was to be done?

Colonel Sanders, James Williams, John Lott and others who had carried off the successful prosecution of Ives felt that the time had come to form an army for a definite battle against the road agents. Sometime during the two days after the execution of Ives, a Vigilance Committee was formed at a meeting somewhere in Alder Gulch, three different places claiming the honor (the chances are that all were scenes of separate meetings). An oath was signed to read:

> We the undersigned uniting ourselves in a party for the laudable purposes of arresting thieves and murderers and recovering stollen property do pledge ourselves and our sacred honor each to all others and solemnly swear that we will reveal no secrets, violate no laws of and never desert each other or our standards of justice so help us God as witness our hand and seal this 23 of December A D 1863.[4]

The first signer was James Williams, elected executive officer of the Vigilante band. Other signers were Paris S. Pfouts, well-known storekeeper, President, and John S. Lott of Nevada City, Treasurer. Twenty-one other men signed, not including Wilbur Fisk Sanders, however. As a resident of Bannack, he properly belonged in its group, which was formed later.

Necessarily the organization was secret. At first it may have consisted only of the original twenty-four signers, many of whom were Masons. (They were hardly showing their gratitude, for, according to legend, no Mason had ever been harmed by the road agents, a thing which the Masons attribute to the fact that they were the only organization in the area strong enough to oppose them.) Other people soon aided the group, and if not actually signed-up members, encouraged the cause. The main work of the Vigilantes was accomplished by the small group of original signers, plus a few others.

On December 23rd, half-provisioned and poorly clothed, they started tracking culprits, but news that they were heading toward Cottonwood (Deer Lodge) to hang Whisky Bill and Alex Carter leaked out. A message reading "Get up and dust, and lie low for black ducks" had reached the desperadoes before them. The gang's messenger, Red Yaeger, had passed the Vigilantes on the road and had run two horses to death in

his haste. Captain Williams and his men had their several-day ride for nothing, but they remembered seeing Yaeger on the road, found out he had been here, and knew he had carried the message.

Back through the snow they rode, miserably cold and almost out of supplies. They found Yeager in a wikiup at Rattlesnake Ranch and captured him by a ruse, asking to be let in out of the cold. They took him on to Dempsey's Ranch on the Stinkingwater, twenty miles below Virginia City, and there in the morning arrested Brown, barkeep at this stage station, and the man who had written the message which Red carried. The two men confessed their crimes. The Committee voted to hang them immediately.

Yaeger and Brown swung from a cottonwood branch near the mouth of Alder Creek on New Year's Day. Before Red died he informed on the rest of the gang in order that they might get theirs as well as he, naming twenty-six remaining members, including Plummer as leader.

In the next thirty days, a good many bodies were suspended by the neck in "a noose pendant from a beam proper." The Committee worked efficiently and took their duties seriously, riding hundreds of miles in cold and snow to ferret out road agents. There was no place to hide from them in the Territory. The smartest outlaws rode right out of the country. Those who buried their heads in out-of-the-way places, hoping the "strangling sons of bitches" wouldn't find them, were out of luck.

Vigilante trials were short and perfunctory. The Vigilance committee was not a law-enforcement body nor a judicial one. It was more nearly a military force, organized with the specific purpose of exterminating the enemy. It acted under the orders of a captain and rode under military discipline. The enemy was known, identified by men who had been robbed, by witnesses to crimes, and by Red Yaeger's listing. The trials were

necessarily short; once the enemy had been determined, the Viges were in all haste to defeat them.

The next hangings were in Bannack, after four Virginia City Vigilantes arrived to recruit members to execute Henry Plummer, Ned Ray, and Buck Stinson, whose death warrants they carried in their pockets. They didn't gather many recruits, but there were enough hands to grab each of the condemned men separately and bring them to the gallows which Plummer, as sheriff, had erected for other victims. Three ropes were run over the beam. Since there were no boxes to be jerked from under the men to give them a good drop, they were lifted high in the air in the arms of their executioners and let fall. This failing, they were pulled up by the neck to strangle, a process which left Ned Ray clawing at his throat, gasping, "Hold on, damn it, you're choking me!"

Plummer, like a little boy caught with the jam pot, wept and promised to be good if let off. He died screaming and begging for life. Stinson went out cursing. The b'hoys thought hanging such a good joke on him they couldn't resist taking his body all the way to Virginia City and plopping it into the grave which had been open and waiting for him ever since Dillingham's murder in June,[4a] the grave he had boasted of pissing in.

If there were few men in Bannack who would join the Vigilantes, it was not because they were opposed to executions. The following day they used a howitzer to blast the criminal Pizanthia out of his cabin, moments after he had killed one of his would-be captors. His body was riddled with shots, and then burned on the pyre of his cabin, the ashes of which were sifted for gold by the whores of the town.

The Vigilantes washed their hands of the hysteria of this execution. That night they hanged Dutch John Wagner in the trimmer Vigilante style. It was Sunday, January 10, 1864.

In Virginia City, four days later, the Vigilance Committee strung up five men in an unfinished building before a crowd of thousands. B'hoys stood in the street, hung from windows, looked on from rooftops, watching the solemn proceedings as the afternoon shadows lengthened.

It had been an exciting day. In early morning, the town had discovered it was surrounded by a cordon of five hundred men which allowed anyone to enter, but no one to leave, an operation intended to capture the six road agents known to be in town. Following that had been the search which had ferreted out five of the six men the Committee were looking for, a search which one of the guards noted had caused bummers with prickling consciences to be very quiet all day.

Club Foot George Lane, Jack Gallagher, Frank Parish, Boone Helm and Hays Lyon were captured; the sixth suspect, Bill Hunter, escaped through the line of guards by slowly crawling out of town through a drainage ditch. Only he and Jack Gallagher, who was found hiding in a roll of blankets, seemed to sense they were in danger. The others just couldn't believe the rumor that Plummer had been hanged.

One by one the outlaws were brought before Paris Pfouts and the Executive Committee and informed of their sentence. They had been tried in absentia the night before. They were marched in the center of a hollow square up Wallace Street to an unfinished building on the corner of Van Buren. There they were stood on packing boxes, all in a line, five ropes over a single beam.

Even as they stood there, knots adjusted about their necks, Gallagher called to a man standing in a hotel window, "Say, I'm going to heaven! I'll be there in time to open the gate for you, old fellow."

The boxes were kicked out from under them one at a time, except for Club Foot George, the first to go, who set the pattern for dying with spirit by giving his hat a toss and

jumping from his box. The one-time cannibal, Boone Helm, watched the drop of two other men, looked coolly at the swinging body of Gallagher and remarked, "Kick away, old fellow; I'll be in hell with you in a minute," and then shouted, "Every man for his principles—hurrah for Jeff Davis! Let 'er rip," before his wind was cut off.

The bodies hung for two hours and then were lined up outside on the street, where their friends found them and buried them on the hill above town. John Grannis went back up the gulch to his claim and wrote in his diary, "very well Satisfied with the Days work Saw five men hung and not a very good Day for hanging neither." [5]

The Vigilantes now had done for twelve men; they were almost halfway through the list given them by Red Yaeger. On their next foray they rid the Territory of eight more of their enemies, riding to Hell Gate (near the present town of Missoula) to do so. Twenty men hanged in less than a month—a performance redolent of hysteria and lynching; but the fizzing passions of a lynch mob would not have burned hot enough to withstand the frigid 400-mile horseback ride to Hell Gate and back, nor have smoldered through sub-zero nights of sleeping in the snow. Two hundred miles of snow whould have saved road agents fleeing to Hell Gate from lynchers, but it was no deterrent to Jim Williams and his little army of determined men.

The last of the current crop of outlaws was hanged on February 3rd, the escapee, Bill Hunter. His death made the twenty-first Vigilante hanging since January 2nd. The remaining five escaped the noose.

When the Vigilantes coiled their hemp after hanging Hunter, they thought they had finished with hangman's duties for a while, but only eleven days later they took justice into their own hands again and strung up a man in Virginia City for a killing perpetrated February 14th.[6] Soon after that some

of them participated in the lynching of J. A. Slade. Slade had raised enough hell about town to get the b'hoys' dander up, but nobody had tangled with him yet, because a gang of rowdies, among whom was Bill Fairweather, always sided with him. His reputation throughout the West was that of a killer, but he had slain no one in Virginia City. He ended up dangling from the crossbeam of the gate to the Elephant Corral as a public nuisance because hanging was the remedy of the time.

Not that the b'hoys objected to the manner of his taking off; on the contrary, they were equally fond of mob law or martial law, if neither interfered with their mining. On February 27th James Morley, writing in his diary, commented, "The desperadoes being pretty well annihilated now, letters will go more safely. The number of the desperado gang now hung in this region by the vigilance committee, is not less than thirty [he was in error]. So the roads are now pretty well cleared of them . . ." And, later, "Since the summary proceedings of the Vigilance Committee order and quiet prevail throughout the country and one feels as safe, if not safer, than in the States . . ." [7] Newcomers, who had not experienced the terrors of road-agent rule, did not object to the dictatorship of the Vigilantes, either. A letter written home on August 9, 1864 stated:

"I am now in the New Territory of Montana not yet organized. . . . We now live under a vigillance committee who are not *chosen* but initiates. No one knows who they are. They hung one man and whipped another a night or two since. Strange to say there is the most perfect acquiescence in this secret and invisible Government, and we all feel serene & quiet. . . ." [8]

Gratefully, the b'hoys abdicated the rights of the inept miners' court to this secret society. For more than two years the Viges were judges, sheriffs, jailers and executioners to

the Territory. During this period they flogged more often then they hanged, for now petty crime was truly the problem of the Territory. The "honest miner" was surrounded by bummers with sticky fingers. A b'hoy with a big woodpile was bound to have it shrink whether or not he had a fire. Meerschaum pipes were lifted behind the owner's back from the place he had set them; piles of emigrant belongings were looted unless watched closely. Anything unattached was carried away. One of the early issues of the *Montana Post* carried an admonition from the editor: "Last Warning.—You that gobbled our old sheet iron stove, bring it back or we will send for it." [9] Likewise, a lady who had a few hens which provided her with the eggs so scarce they sold for a dollar apiece found that the only place her chickens were safe was in a corner of her cabin.

Chicken thieves and petty burglars were eventually nabbed by the town policemen and punished by the local courts, but when it came to punishment of murderers and horse thieves, the b'hoys had confidence only in the Vigilantes. They kept them on the job long after civil authority was established in the Territory.

Officialdom frowned. When Territorial Judge Hosmer addressed the first grand jury on December 5, 1864, he lauded the past deeds of the Vigilantes, but pleaded, "Let us then erect no more impromptu scaffolds. Let us inflict no more midnight executions." [10] He warned that if the Committee continued to act it would be the duty of his court to charge them with a "highly penal offense." The b'hoys of the grand jury tersely recommended to the judge that the courts turn all criminal business over to the hands of the Vigilantes.

They knew the Viges would get the job done and would provide a nice cheap hanging as well. They hated to part with their dust to provide expensive board, lodging and jury for accused criminals, so much so that in 1866 they requested

of Judge Hosmer that he release a prisoner named Gibson to the Vigilantes because it was "expensive for the state to keep him." [11] Request refused.

During the years of 1864, '65, and '66 the Vigilantes continued to ride. In '64 and '65 it was probably necessary that they do so, for the roads were still lonely and much treasure traveled along them. Such bait attracted other road agents whose guns could only be matched by a large force. In 1865 the roughs were warned in bills posted in Virginia City reading "Admonition to 'dangerous classes' " and prohibiting "drawing deadly weapons, except as a last resort," [12] but the Vigilantes still considered hanging the best remedy. A few days after the bill posting, they strung up Charles Wilson, supposedly a baddie left over from the old gang, as a further warning, and buried him next to the original five.

Ironically, the Vigilantes clung to a double standard when they decided which criminals would or would not be punished by them. They kept their hands off any murderer who came from the "respectable" class (businessmen) of town. Thus, when a popular store owner shot and killed his partner during an argument over the business, he was lodged in jail (never mind the expense) and given a trial. He was, of course, acquitted.[13]

By the spring of 1867 the organization had definitely outlived its usefulness. The b'hoys were tired of waking up to a "man for breakfast" and worried because the Viges had developed into a "Dark Lantern Clique" who operated only under the cover of darkness. Men were concerned over a rule of Judge Lynch which newspapers treated humorously, commenting, "Leander W. Johnson, accused of a want of appreciation of the law of *meum* and *tuum,* was lately suspended by the neck, in Deer Lodge County" [14] or jocosely noting that "Hangman's Tree, in Dry Gulch, is barren this week—no crop, nor sign of one." [15]

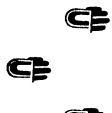
The miners had cause to worry, for the hangman's knot had been adjusted behind the left ear of at least fifteen men since the Vigilantes had caught up with Bill Hunter in 1864.[16] All of these hangings were not claimed by the Vigilantes, but if others got the itch, they had set the precept.

In March of 1867, the b'hoys of Highland District had had enough and posted a warning to Vigilantes:

> NOTICE!
>
> We, now, as a sworn band of law-abiding citizens, do hereby solemnly swear that the first man that is hung by the Vigilantes of this place, we will retaliate five for one, unless it be done in broad daylight, so that all may know what it is for. We are all satisfied that in times past, you did some glorious work, but the time has come when law should be enforced. Old fellow-members, the time is not like it was. We had good men with us; but now, there is a great change. There is not a thief come to the country but what "rings' himself into the present committee. We know you all. You must not think you can do as you please. We are American citizens, and you shall not drive, and hang, whom you please.
>
> (Signed) FIVE FOR ONE [17]

Shortly after the appearance of this note, Vigilante action ceased.

CHAPTER FIVE



TAKING THE GOLD FROM THE GULCH

JAMES MORLEY owned a claim along with his partner, Jules, about two miles up gulch from Virginia City. He worked his claim steadfastly, for he was a steady man. No big drunks kept him from sluicing; no laziness kept him lying in bed. Each week he worked four more days than the two required for representation work. He had only one wish on New Year's Day, 1864: "May this year see me back to the States in possession of the gold now buried deep in my claims." When, only two weeks later, the b'hoys on all the surrounding claims streamed down gulch to help the Vigilantes guard the town and round up road agents, Morley stolidly turned the creaking windlass, raising up the shaft the paydirt Jules was scraping from bedrock. Though the calendar said January, and January was no month for placering, the weather continued good, and Morley made the most of it. That night he kept up his diary by writing:

> At windlass all day. . . . A stream of men going by to town all A. M. which returned late in P. M. . . . from whom I learned five men were hung in Virginia City to-day.

> for being implicated in highway robberies and murders. . . . Such wholesale hanging ought to rid the country of these desperadoes who have rendered travelling so dangerous. Weather warm and pleasant.[1]

He was a simple miner. It hadn't occurred to him to take the day off to lend a hand in town. Nope. Not while there was gold to be dug, and the weather remained good.

Bummers and businessmen, sports and teamsters had time for such goings-on, but not the serious claim holder. Every day they could, these men put on their gum boots and shoveled at the innards of Alder Gulch, removing them and washing them in the cold waters of the creek and piling all but a few grains of the entrails back into the gulch again. They worked twelve hours a day or more, six days a week, with no time for leaning on a shovel. Their limbs were mangled, their bodies were weakened forever by harsh work in the cold and damp, their lives were sometimes snuffed out by sudden accident. And all for a few tons of the yellow stuff from all of the thousands of tons of dirt they moved.

Their very activity inspired one newly arrived schoolma'am to record it in her diary:

> There is a temporary bridge (very shaky) across the gulch that wagons may pass over. Standing on this bridge, in the middle of the gulch, looking up and down, and even beneath my feet, the scene is a lively one. So many men, it seems they would be in each other's way. They remind one of the bees around a hive. And such active work. It seemed that not one of that great multitude stopped for one instant shoveling and wheeling dirt, passing and repassing each other without a hitch. It made me tired to look at them. The ground is literally turned inside out; great deep holes and high heaps of dirt . . .[2]

These b'hoys in their gum boots and beards may have looked the very picture of efficiency to a green girl, but they were the laughingstock of old California and Colorado miners who called them "Pumpkin pilers" and wrote letters to the newspaper making fun of them:

> . . . they know more about raising wheat on the prairies, digging ginseng in the "Big Woods," gathering cranberries in the Minnesota swamps, or logs in the pineeries, than using the pick and shovel; but they say that digging gold pays far better . . . just watch them handle a pick. A good miner has a pick drawn to a fine, sharp point; he works underneath the pay dirt on the bed rock; . . . with gravel . . . Get underneath it with a good long, sharp pick, and it is easily brought down . . . a greenhorn has a short, thick, stubbed pick; he stands on the top, like a chicken on a grain pile; gets out one rock, and finds he has another below it requiring the same labor. Thus he works hard and accomplishes little. . . .[3]

Another writer claimed that the gulch in 1866 "has not been mined—*only mined at*" and that in the entire gulch there were "neither marks or signs of science, skill, judgment or economy." And, he continued:

> An excavation here is called a "hole," another a short distance off is a "shaft," and a third a few feet further a "drift;" timbers, spiles, etc., are thrown in promiscuously (which is called timbering) . . . After a few days' work, the shaft or drift caves, the place fills up with water and dirt: the miner sinks another hole, strikes the paystreak "takes out his pile" in a short time and leaves the country. A miner naturally asks the question, and reasonably, too, what kind of an animal burrowed that hole and run that drift?[4]

If the gulch took on the haphazard look of a mole colony, it wasn't all because of ignorance, however. Here in Alder Gulch they had problems. In the first place, the gold lay under heavy overburden, twenty feet or more below streambed. In order to put in a bedrock flume, by which the gold could be most easily worked, the b'hoys would have had to shilly-shally through weeks of planning and to endure more weeks of digging. They couldn't see it. Digging a flume across dozens of claims asked a miracle of cooperation from them here, where Southerner couldn't abide Northerner, and Californians complained that "The Pike's Peakers and Easterners, generally, manifest a most clannish and illiberal attitude towards the broad-shouldered, intelligent-browed, big-hearted and God-like Californians." [5] A bedrock flume was out.

For these hasty miners, the best way of getting at Alder Gulch gold was by sinking a shaft to bedrock and then drifting along the old streambed. They had to winch a lot of extra gravel to the surface this way, dirt which had to go to make way for the tunnel, dirt which had to be dumped somewhere on the narrow claim bottom, somewhere out of the way of the workings. If it spilled over onto the next claim, the neighbors were liable to throw it back—at the first head in sight. Also, this manner of placer mining left a lot of gold behind, for a man hunched over in a tiny drift (tiny because no one drew any more gravel up the shaft than necessary), slopping about in seepage water, peering about by candle light, missed a lot of gold. In addition, he left much of it in the pillars of earth which supported the roof over his head. But there was lots of gold, and he didn't worry about it.

Mining was grueling labor even to men used to hard work. One experienced b'hoy, writing a letter home containing advice to be given his brother, confessed he was about played out: "There is probably *no* chance for him to get any work

here except mining and I think that would be rather too hard for him to stand. It is harder work than I *want* to do much more of, and I know I am much more . . ." (end of letter).[6] Another miner wrote in his diary that ". . . a years hard work in the mines has made me feel ten years older." [7]

In addition to working underground, the miner built his own windlass, constructed ore cars and tracks, and often whip-sawed logs into rough sluice-boards. He slaved for weeks in which never a flake of gold was seen. He worked early and late and some Sundays. The happy prospector who made his fortune in two or three days, and then skylarked off to town for a bender is a man who never lived. He was dreamed up by the b'hoys who did their mining in saloons. As an observer said of the actual miner of the day, "Sleep comes without effort, and there is no strong desire to get up in the morning."

The shaft might have to be dug several times if there was no pay at the bottom, using up precious summer time, time which men in diggings with less overburden could use washing gravel. Morley and his partner opened their claim on August 2, 1863. They had only a twenty-foot hole to dig; they were both experienced miners; they worked doggedly day after day, prying out boulders, building a windlass and hoisting countless buckets of worthless gravel to the surface. Yet on the 23rd of the month Morley wrote in his journal, "Still camped in brush and living on anticipations . . . these claims are very hard to open . . . water troubles so much . . . 'bed rock' line lies some twenty feet under the surface."

The next day, they hit bedrock and eagerly "rocked out twenty pans from bottom of shaft, getting forty cents." Two cents a pan. Theirs was not to be one of Alder's bonanza claims. Soon they sank another shaft which showed more color, but not enough to make them rich. During their first year, they worked their claim thoroughly, searching along the

bedrock for the pocket that would make their big gamble worth while, make this long absence from families not such a dreary waste. Their best day they retrieved $64.75 in dust, their worst day only sixty-five cents; and one day they made only $1.35 from seventy-six buckets of sand. They were still living on last year's anticipations of which Morley had written: "This place, so far as opened, has proved very rich; some claims have yielded as high as fifty four ounces ($970.00) in a day, per eight men, and many yield $40.00 to $50.00 per hand. Such claims, with labor at $6.00 per day, (the present rate) will yield their owners a snug little pile of the precious metal in a short time."

Mining in Alder Gulch was dangerous as well as laborious. The shifting sands of the old riverbed were treacherous, almost beyond control. Cave-ins buried men alive with horrifying regularity; rarely did the frantic digging of those from adjoining claims get to them before they suffocated. At first no one, not even experienced quartz miners, knew how to stay the sand. Only when men who had mined under similar circumstances came into the gulch and taught the correct method of timbering did the regularity of the smothering cease[8]—but partners still took turns risking the dangerous work below ground.

Most good claims were worked with a crew of hired help, three men underground, two miners and an ore-car pusher, and four men above, two on the windlass and two sluicing. Hired hands were often worse miners than the claim owners. Many of them had come into town as drifters and "did not know how to mine, nor did they want to learn. All they wanted was enough money to last them until they could get somewhere else." [9] These men might be useful above ground working the windlass or shoveling tailings or picking rocks from the sluice, but underground they left more gold behind them than they were worth.

Sluicing was the surest way of retrieving placer gold. A sluice was built up a section at a time for easy mobility, each section being perhaps fifteen feet long and from one to four feet wide, according to the amount of material to be washed and the amount of water available. Because of its shape it was known as a box, the sluice being made up of several boxes. Removable riffles were placed in the bottom of each box. Riffles were made from any material which would provide a rough surface to collect gold dust, as it, being heavier than its matrix, sinks to the bottom as the whole washes down the inclined sluice. There were riffles made using cleats nailed across the bottom of the sluice; others used rough-sawed tree butts with the rough side up, small round poles nailed close together or a board through which many auger holes had been bored. The lower end of the sluice, from which the waste material was disgorged, was called the tail-race, hence the name tailings for the discharged material.

If the material being hoisted to the surface was rich (the miner panned a little of this several times daily to check), the head box was cleaned often, maybe once a day, maybe once every several days. The heaviest deposit was naturally always in the first box. Lower boxes were allowed a longer time between cleanings to allow them to build up their deposits.

In order to clean riffles, the water was dammed immediately above the one to be cleaned. This dam supplied the riffle cleaner with ample water for panning. A tub was brought near. The larger material was removed and placed in the tub, then the riffle was removed from the sluice box and *carefully* cleaned into the tub. The contents of the tub were then panned, for they were not pure gold: the riffles collected black sand as well, which had to be separated from the dust. The gold was collected into containers and hid under the bed for the Saturday-night division of spoils.

Mercury was sometimes placed in the riffles to aid in the collection of the gold particles. The gold and mercury formed amalgam, from which the gold could be recovered by heating, the mercury boiling off to be recovered by distilling and used again, the gold left behind. Sometimes the mercury was just boiled off, and greenhorns accidentally killed themselves by cooking their amalgam over the cabin fire, dying from breathing the mercury fumes. Others, smart enough to leave the cabin while the cooking was going on, died from eating food which had become impregnated with mercury. The *Post* warned all amateurs to do their mercury cooking outside and to stand ten feet away even then, but some of the b'hoys couldn't read.

If tenderfoot miners were no great shakes when it came to digging gold, they were little better at sluicing it. They slapped their boxes together and set them at such a pitch that fine gold washed right on down the tail-race. Some of the tailings they left behind later panned out at four to twelve cents a pan, a good living for anybody. But what the hell was twelve cents a pan to men who spilled enough dust buying drinks to make a big night's saloon sweepings worth five dollars a pan—as many a bummer knew.

Gold left in the ground or gold dumped into tailings they cared little for, but gold left in sluices overnight, or gold stashed around the place, they were mighty chary of. They stood guard over uncleaned sluice boxes at night. Unaccustomed riches to guard made a man trigger-happy. It was unwise to walk too close to a sluice box on a dark night, for a noise down thataway might draw a potshot instead of a search. Being caught on another man's claim, pan in hand, was also chancy, for claims had been worked out by bummers while the owner was gone, and the b'hoys were not likely to believe even the likeliest stories. They knew that the gold from one claim

looked mighty like gold from another, and anybody's assertion that he'd just hit a rich pocket could vouch for his sudden affluence.

But guarding gold was not a problem peculiar to Alder Gulch; it just added to other problems, chief of which was water supply. During the summer months the b'hoys along Alder Creek and its tributaries cursed the summer sun and hot wind which daily sucked up the snows from the mountains, reducing to a trickle the creek water available for sluicing. Each miner swore at the men above him, who were, he was sure, wasting it. He built a dam, if he could, behind which water deepened until there was enough for a freshet to spill down his sluice-way. He fretted with his partners on the bank of the miniature lake while the water inched its way from a puddle to a pond, until the headgate was raised and everyone worked double-quick to wash as much dirt as possible in the brief floodwaters. Then he chafed again and tried not to think of the amount of gold they could be sacking if only there was enough water. If the summer continued really dry, the whole party might be dry-gulched—left with no water until the fall freshets.

Miners sang the "no-water blues" as long as placer mining was important in the gulch, a plaint accompanied by fierce overtones of anger whenever any other body attempted to tap their supply. Thus they raised a ruckus when the Virginia City Water Company started to pipe the headwaters of Daylight Creek into town, but were unable to stop the project—or decided it wouldn't harm them. They hatched various schemes to remedy the lack of water, the most grandiose of which was the one of bringing the waters of the Madison River into Alder Gulch by starting a canal miles and miles upriver. Some speculators received a charter from the first legislature to dig such a canal, which they estimated they could do for $75,000, but they never could persuade the b'hoys to hold still long enough

to make their scheme work. Another syndicate, the Virginia City Water Ditch Company, did succeed in bringing water from lakes beyond the head of the gulch, but an expected 1500-inch head of water turned out to be a 300-inch trickle. Their more ambitious plan, an effort to dig a canal from the Ruby River to the gulch, collapsed in 1868 after only a few miles of channel were dug.[10]

The greenhorn, wanting only to scrape up what gold he could and to head for home, cared little about such long-range planning. Water was something that came out of the sky, not a carefully flumed product purchased like so much milk. Water in the mountains was free, or should be. The damnedest country, this—day after day of big, black thunderheads dropping nothing but lightning. Back home, now, a black cloud meant business; it wasn't all rumbling with no results.

Sometimes, though, in the driest part of the summer, a corker of a cloud would come grumbling all the way up the Stinkingwater. A man could see the water falling from it in a steady sheet. When it hit, anyone caught out in it found shelter dang quick, for this was a mountain hailstorm, bombarding him with pellets as big as marbles—or bigger—shredding leaves from quaking aspens, plucking feathers from sage hens. Brand-new dirt roofs leaked and eroded an inch or two during such a downpour.

After the storm, partners came out of their cabin to wade through inches of slush and to gaze grimly at the hole where their dam used to be, the well that was their shaft hole. The sun, shining now in all its pre-storm heat, revealed sluice boxes disappearing along the crest of the flash flood, the fruit of a western cloud burst. Mining in the deforested bottom of a Rocky Mountain gulch had drawbacks never mentioned in the Guide Books to the Gold Fields published back home.

Too much water, coursing along the escape channels it had always used, gathering volume from every side gulch, was

an annual thing for Alder Gulch in May and June when melting snow waters joined with rains. "Drowned! Drowned! Drowned!" was the yearly complaint of miners near Nevada City, for here the spring run-off from Alder and Brown's Gulch comingled to ruin their workings. Damage of $10,000 per claim was not uncommon, damage which it took as much as two months to repair.[11]

The b'hoys soon learned to plan their work according to the water supply. After a season's experience with its floodings and ebbings, the shrewd miner, unable to sluice during the winter when the damnable liquid turned to solid, used the cold months to bring up gravel from his drift below, stockpiling it against the spring defrost, making sure that no part of the spring torrent went past him without having washed some of his pay dirt. Experienced miners also used this time to dike their claims against the expected spring run-off.

Seepage water underground was also a problem, sometimes so great as to force a man to abandon his claim. He could have been rid of this water, if he hadn't been in such an all-fired hurry and had been willing to spend a little time and money, to cooperate in establishing drains which would have served all. As it was, if the water became too bad, he joined the next stampede. Similarly, if a claim spread to too great a depth, on went the claim-holder; he was after wealth, not competence.

Though this clumsy miner was laughed at and criticized, for the most part he went home happy. When homesickness overcame him, or when he "had all he wanted," he toted home whatever he had of what he'd come for with never a backward glance. Usually he took off in the fall to avoid the idle winter, its boredom and expense. In the fall of 1865, the *Post* reported those who had struck it rich were heading home, one man transporting 400 pounds of gold dust, another 200 pounds, and "from 100 lbs. to 25 lbs. . . . so common, that

a record of the names would look like our post-office list." [12] The poor man transporting only twenty-five pounds of gold in his carpetbag had a fortune of at least $5400 as his take-home pay. If he had stayed at home, chances were that he would have had to work about eleven years just to earn $5400, with no hope of saving such a sum in a lifetime of working for wages. The man with 100 pounds of gold was fixed for life.

These men could have sold their gold in Virginia City for greenbacks or for bank drafts, but they would have had to sell for less than they could get for it in the East. Though the risk was greater, the extra reward made up for it. Most men transported their own gold.

Claim after claim, Alder Gulch yielded a yellow treasure that outdid all other placer discoveries, occasionally giving up unbelievable chunks of gold that squatted in the riffles when the dirty sluice water had drained away. Nuggets accounted for little of the actual wealth of the diggings, but there was something about their size (there still is, for that matter—all that gold in one hunk) that made them the talk of the town. Any big new nugget was always "the biggest yet found in Montana," and was displayed at the offices of the *Post* or at a trustworthy saloon.

Virginia City b'hoys crowed over the tendency of their gulch to produce nuggets. The Nelson Gulch crowd boasted of their big $2000 beauty (seven and a third pounds), but had to clam up when, according to the newspaper, Alder disgorged a lump of gold weighing fifteen pounds in May of 1867.[13] Ironically, the nugget was supposedly brought to the surface in a re-working of Bill Fairweather's discovery claim. Though the *Post* warranted such a nugget, it should be remembered that Editor Blake, who took over the paper after Dimsdale, admitted fabricating news when none was to be had, and it is likely that this nugget was the work of his alchemy.

The great thing about Alder Gulch was not the size of its

nuggets, but the extent of its gold deposit. Here gold was not pocketed in a piddling quarter mile or less; it lay in an almost continuous bed stretching in a sixteen-mile ribbon. Here was room for not just ten claims, or fifty claims or a hundred claims; close to a thousand claims were staked along its bottom. Most places the gold was thick, some places thin, but nobody found none.

But more men came here than the gulch, for all its size, could hold. They spilled over into tributary gulches; they staked claims on neighboring Brown, Bivin's and Ramshorn Gulches. Yet every day brought new pilgrims, who had traveled hundreds of hard miles to mine gold, who begged to be sold a piece of the gulch. The b'hoys with fourth-rate claims salted them and waited for "the new comers from America going up and down this gulch, with a hundred or two dollars of nice new Lincoln's in their pockets, asking all sorts of questions in regard to mining, and crazy to strip themselves of their last red, by purchasing one of these salted claims" [14] (thus they were described in a miner's letter home). B'hoys on the sell swore to the newcomers that they would be working the ground themselves, but they just didn't have the capital, or showed a bulging poke of what might be gold and allowed they had all they wanted.

Speculation in claims ran extremely high in 1864, but no one was going to get more than a small piece of a claim for a few hundred dollars in greenbacks. Ordinary claims were selling for $1000 to $2000, while good claims demanded at least $10,000 per hundred feet.[15] Selling a claim was the easiest way of making it pay, so much so that the six discoverers took the easy way, peddling their claims and all but one taking off for other parts. Only Thomas Cover remained to build the first sawmill, up Granite Creek, and, later on, to build the first flour mills in the Territory. Only Thomas Cover would die a rich man from investing his Montana-made capital in Califor-

nia real estate. (Barney Hughes and Bill Fairweather also enriched Californians, Hughes being swindled by the San Francisco real-estate sharks and Fairweather by the San Francisco saloon owners.)

No one knew how much gold was being taken from the gulch each day, but it was so much that one man wrote home saying, "It is my deliberate opinion, that if daily accurate statements could be obtained and published, it would create a wilder gold delirium than has yet prevailed," but he didn't dare to venture a guess. The only estimate made was that of Judge Blake, one-time editor of the *Post,* who guessed that $30,000,000 had been taken from the gulch in 1864 alone, and that by 1866 it had produced $60,000,000.[16] What the total take has been, no one knows, for there is no telling how much gold was recovered by the Chinese who worked the tailings left by earlier miners, mucking for some forty years but never revealing what they were pocketing, by the men before them who had taken over abandoned claims and at last put in a bedrock flume, or by the miners of the '60's. Judge L. L. Callaway, who should have been able to make a good guess, writing in the 1930's, put the total production of Alder Gulch at about $100,000,000—at the old gold prices.[17]

CHAPTER SIX

HOW THE B'HOYS LIVED

THE PILGRIM ENTERING Virginia City early in 1865 saw a town so new that the clapboard and log buildings had not yet weathered; so jerry-built that some of these same buildings were already beginning to sag or lean—in fact, a few had collapsed; so unkempt as to appear as if refuse had been piling for decades rather than for months; so crowded as to make privacy almost impossible.

This same pilgrim, standing at the crossing of Wallace and Jackson streets, known as Content Corner, saw, in one block in each direction, most of the important business houses of town: narrow, ugly wooden buildings, huddled together, sprouting overlapping signs that befuddled his eye. Some of the stores were so narrow, the owner obviously had merely roofed over and plugged the ends of a walkway between two buildings to provide a niche for himself. Strange wooden chutes slanted from eaves over sidewalks to carry rainwater to the street, presenting even more of a jumble to the pilgrim. Stovewood was piled in the street fronting each store.

Behind him, at the foot of Wallace Street, he could see the beginnings of a Chinatown plus the very evident red-light

district just hovering over the workings in the gulch below. As he had walked up the street, he had passed Leviathon Hall, a log building eighty feet long and twenty-eight feet wide, said to hold 1,000 people (more on the occasion of the great Con Orem-Hugh O'Neill New Year's fight).

Up Wallace Street to his right, just beyond the corner, was a handsome stone building, two stories high, which the sign told him was occupied on the lower floor by the Gem Saloon. This is the Stonewall Building. He would find out later that upstairs was the Gem Reading Room, a place of relative quiet, containing all the latest papers and periodicals, dominoes, checker and chess boards, but no pasteboards; a place for quiet conversation, but where religious and political subjects, which led to wrangling, were strictly taboo. Dues, five dollars per month[1]—for a few months. The place would soon close doors: too much like a mausoleum for the b'hoys.

Across Wallace Street from the Gem was the big Idaho Hotel and Billiard Parlor, almost nudging its little neighbor on the corner, the *Montana Post* building, into the street. Across Jackson Street (downstreet) from the Gem was the two-story adobe building which made this the center of town, now occupied by Content's Store, which gave the intersection its name.

One block to the pilgrim's left and down the steep little hill behind the *Montana Post,* he could see a corral, from the gate of which hung a rude cutout of an elephant—the Elephant Corral. If he had sharp eyes, he might see a man in the corral with the same rude elephant shape appliqued to his vest front, a walking reminder that this man would auction anything saleable. On the corner diagonally across was Anton Holter's White Pine Lumber Yard. These businesses stood at the corner of Jackson and Cover streets. Cover Street wound along Daylight Creek and would eventually be straightened by command of a picayunish city council who allowed only that "houses not in the middle of the street will not be disturbed." [2] A sign

painter, a blacksmith and a candlemaker had workshops on this street, but it was mostly corrals on the creek side and dwellings on the other side.

Behind the dwellings rose another hill, Cemetery Hill, the horizon line. A number of wooden headboards were scattered in silhouette across one end of the hill. At least seven hanged men lay buried up there. Soon many of the headboards would disappear as the righteous and well-heeled of the town moved the bodies of loved ones to another burying place on the hill to save them from the contamination of resting near the bodies of criminals. (Those bodies having no relatives in town, or no one to pay their fare from one grave to the next, were allowed to lie where they were and take their chances with the road agents.)

The pilgrim, still admiring the view from Content Corner, could see only a little more than a block to his right—just to the buildings beyond the crossing of Jackson and Idaho Streets. Jackson Street slanted easily uphill to meet Idaho Street —and was one of the most "pedestriated" streets in town. If the pilgrim moseyed up that way, he would soon know that this was *the* block. At his left, across the street and against the sky, rose the glass checkerboard paning of a skylight emphasized by the sign PICTURES—the photographer's studio. Below the studio was Con Orem's Champion Saloon. From across the street the voice of the extroverted Con could be heard telling how he knocked out the champ of Denver. In spite of his loud ways, Con ran the soberest saloon in town. He didn't drink and wouldn't take any guff from drunks. Immediately uphill of Con's was the neat, painted storefront of John Rockfellow, General Merchandise.

Walking on up the street, the newcomer passed another stone building, the Star Restaurant, the Delmonico's of Virginia City. Next to it was the Claseby House, then a barbershop

and, on the corner, the Arcade Saloon (ice cream and, a rarity in the town, a good cup of coffee also served).

At Idaho Street the pilgrim could see that this, too, was a thriving business section. Tootle and Leach, wholesalers, catty-corner across the intersection from him, Chicago House on up to the left. Directly across Idaho Street was the Planter's House. W. A. Sanders, Attorney, behind the Arcade Saloon. Across Jackson Street to the left, the corner store of John Howe, General Merchandise. And just down street a way was the sign BREWERY, which drew the pilgrim away from his sightseeing and into Mannheim's for a brew.

If it had been just a little later in the year, he would have had to wade across to the opposite boardwalk, for here, in the spring, the word street was a euphemism for the muddy boundary which surrounded each block. It was of little use for foot travel, difficult for wagons, and much complained of in the *Montana Post* in any year from 1864 to 1868:

> The heavy rain in the beginning of the week and the miry state of our thoroughfares, prevented any performance at the Theatre, for some days. (1865)

> (a mud hole forces ladies) . . . to make a long and muddy detour, involving an elevation of skirt not relished by the most valued and respected of the sex. (1865)

> Bootblacking is ridiculous; cleanliness below the knee impossible. (1866)

> Wallace Street has been chartered a canal. A ferry boat will be put on at Jackson Street crossing. (1867)

The streets might have served under ordinary traffic conditions, but here, in the spring and summer especially, they

were choked with traffic, hundreds of men on foot, wagons of every kind driving wherever an open space presented itself. The tremendous flow of heavy freight wagons on iron-rimmed wheels towed by straining iron-shod hoofs, turned ordinary mud into deep, soupy mire.

In the summer hoofs and wheels sank into loose dust, but it was more of a discomfort than a hindrance. Still, traffic moved slowly, because there was no traffic control of any kind, no right of way, no proper side on which to drive, no parking ordinances. Fleets of freight wagons, joined tandem—two, three, even four in line—stretched their eighteen to twenty oxen ahead of them, blocking the street as they unloaded. The town marshal ordered all traffic off Wallace Street except wagons loading or unloading freight, in an attempt to relieve the congestion, and ordered the auctioneers to hold their auctions elsewhere than the middle of the main street, but the local court didn't support his command. The old disorder prevailed.

The streets were unusually filthy. Livery owners piled manure there from occasional stable cleanings. Dead animals lay for days where they had dropped, though editors warned, "If it gets a few degrees warmer they'll not smell pretty well." Hogs rooted where they would, a nuisance legislated against but never controlled, leading the *Post* to complain in 1866 that residents did not need plows, for the ground had already been rooted.

Obstructions in the street were a menace to traffic. Excavators for new buildings piled dirt in the street. The holes at the foot of Jackson Street were avowed to be " 'somebody's business' to be fixed. Several wagons have upset there and 'smashed things generally.' "

Nobody knew whose business it was to fix the streets, for the city didn't have the money for it. The city council at-

tempted to do something by ordering all property owners to "clean up the streets in front of their lots, after this is done, the Marshall will keep the thoroughfare clear, having a cart for the purpose." The marshal and his cart evidently weren't what was needed, for, soon after, the streets were being complained of again. The poor man hardly could have been expected to pick up behind litterbugs such as one of the doctors, who, cleaning up his office, nonchalantly tossed an amputated hand out of the window. Perhaps the biggest aid the marshal had was the annual flooding of the streets, when the accumulated refuse of months sank out of sight, the only complete street cleaning ever accomplished.

A pedestrian had to "look a ledle oudt." Sidewalks were uncertain things, being full boardwalks in some places, planks thrown carelessly across mudholes in other places, sometimes fine stone walkways—and in most places non-existent. His path at intersections might be blocked by auctioneers bidding off horseflesh, wagons, miner's shovels or what have you at a convenient corner. Jaywalking, he was in danger of being trampled by these same auctioneers galloping up and down the street, shouting their wares, showing off an animal to be sold. This was a real danger to anyone on foot, and complained of in the *Post:* ". . . running stock through a crowded thoroughfare . . . is dangerous . . . to pedestrians. . . . For if six men . . . try the strength of their lungs at once, going at full speed at the same time, it is impossible to ascertain from which side danger is approaching. . . ." [3]

The nocturnal stroller had to feel his way, for Virginia City streets at night were virtually blacked out except for an occasional illuminated sign such as the one before the Champion Saloon proclaiming "Everything for the Boys" and except for such dim light as might filter through windows and open doorways. A desultory lantern hung at street crossings was all

the city boasted of street lights. Excavations were mostly unmarked, and the unwary sometimes disappeared into cisterns or ditches.

Shank's mare was the mode of transportation for almost everyone in town. Buggies and similar rigs were rarities, except for the very few to be rented from the liveries, for few people had driven a buggy across the mountains into the wilderness. Bishop Tuttle wrote to his wife concerning the singular lack of wheeled transportation, warning her they would have to go horseback on short trips out of town, and remarking about the street scene, "There were no vehicles in the streets that I had been used to. Instead there were huge freight wagons from which goods were being discharged . . ." [4] Scheduled trips up to Summit as well as down to Nevada City were made by what were termed omnibuses. They were not successful ventures; most miners preferred to walk; what was a few miles' hiking to men who had walked into the Territory from Missouri?

The little town undoubtedly didn't "smell so pretty good." Horses, oxen, and hogs in the street left certain effluvia behind them. The numerous livery stables added a similar stench to the wind. Rotting carcasses of cats, dogs, and perhaps horses added further aroma to it. Taking a bath was virtually impossible for a lot of the population, and some of them would have been puzzled at the necessity. Luckily, the drainage was good, the mountain air invigorating, and the spring water up Daylight Creek pure and sweet, for the miner was too busy to worry about sanitation. Even so, he was healthy and needed little medical attention. His eternal squabbling gave lots of work to lawyers, but in 1864 it was observed that "doctors [are] about to become extinct."

There wasn't a building in town of any graciousness, any luxury. The Reverend Hough described the place as being "a city of ten thousand inhabitants, and not a frame or plastered

house in it, but consisting of tents, 'dug-outs' and log-cabins, mostly with dirt roofs and no floors." [5] The young schoolma'am who had been astounded at the energy of the miners, was "not very favorably impressed with Virginia City. It is the shabbiest town I ever saw, not a really good house in it." [6]

Allen & Millard's bank was acknowledged the finest in town, and it consisted of one room papered "neatly" with a sleeping room in back. Saloons were ramshackle, though gaudy, with the exception of the fine Gem Saloon with its sunken dance floor and orchestra in the rear. The People's Theatre, which crowed about its parquette and orchestra in its opening announcements, and had its elegant appointments puffed in the paper, was in fact lined with ordinary muslin flameproofed with alum water. It was described by one visitor as "a hall, capable of holding two hundred and fifty persons, with a rude little rear gallery, long wooden benches, a great wood stove, an orchestra of four, five tallow candles for footlights, a green cambric drop-curtain, and a stage the size of a small bedroom." [7] In spite of the huge stove, it was sometimes so cold in the house that playgoers were forced to leave.

Roofs of earth were all the style at first, even after it was discovered that sleepers under such coverings were liable to waken following a thaw or rainstorm with "faces striped in the most irregular manner," which prompted the *Montana Post* to plead with its subscribers to shingle their roofs before the rains set in and spattered the face of a loved one with mud. Occasionally, when a family sat down to eat, dinner was spoiled by a sudden avalanche of soil onto the tin plates or into the meat platter. The congregation at the one church in town was similarly annoyed, causing the parson to remark about the roof: ". . . while it held dirt but indifferently, it did not hold water at all . . . to the great annoyance of the advocates of 'dirt houses.' " [8] A man was killed when the "mud roof" of the California Exchange Saloon collapsed.

In the town which surely must have had the largest per-capita income in North America at the time, everyone lived wretchedly. The Reverend Mr. Hough and his wife existed in a parsonage the size of a chicken coop:

> Our parsonage at Virginia City was built soon after our arrival there of entirely green logs from the woods, and chinked with the mud nearest at hand. It was 13x16 feet, with dirt roof, one window filled with glass and the other two covered with muslin. A carpet was extemporized of cow skins, placed hair side up, and stretched tightly while green, and nailed to the floor . . . That winter the thermometer was 50 deg. below zero and it was no exageration when I say we were very uncomfortable. Mrs. H. suffered so much from neuralgia that she has totally lost the sight of one eye, and will be a sufferer from the disease to the day of her death.[9]

The minister and his wife could find no relief from the cold by going to church, for one resident of the town wrote in his diary that winter: "Tommy went to church for the first time and nearly froze his feet." [10] But for all of this misery, their accommodations were better than those of the people who were still living in the wagon boxes they had wheeled across the plains and finding them luxurious—compared to a brush wikiup.

Even the well-to-do lived poorly. Rockfellow, the wealthy storekeeper and speculator, slept with the rats amongst the flour sacks in the storage room behind the store. Tilton, the publisher of the *Montana Post*, shared a tiny cabin with two, occasionally three, other men (the third for a time being Bishop Tuttle, who commented, "A man comes in and shakes up rather than makes our bed. Men rather than women do domestic work here"). Every place that would shelter a head

was occupied, tiny cabins renting for twenty to thirty dollars a month.[11]

Hotels were primitive and crowded. Travelers directly from the east were shocked at the best accommodations in town, in the Planter's House, and could not get over how little they received for the $125 a week in their eastern paper money (twenty-five dollars a week in gold).[12] A typical room there was an eight-by-twelve, muslin-ceilinged cubicle containing a bedstead of rough lumber with a straw mattress, straw pillow and two rough army blankets on it, one rough stool, and a piece of broken looking glass. The Reverend Hough and his wife discovered only one sheet on their bed in this hostelry. When they asked about such a peculiar arrangement, the servant informed them it was in use as a tablecloth because of the great rush of business that day. The sheet was returned to their bed, but, Hough surmised, only because they were early risers and would be up in good season to release the sheet for double duty.

Four years later Bishop Tuttle stayed in the same hotel and found conditions little improved. In a letter to his wife he wrote:

> We stop at the 'Planter's House,' the Fifth Avenue Hotel of the place. Our bedroom is about twelve feet square, and in it are one double, and two single beds. Mr. G. and I occupy the double. As there is need, the landlord sends whom he will into the cots. No lock is on the door; no wash bowl or pitcher in the room. Every morning we go down to the office to wash, wiping our faces on the office towel.[13]

Here the walls were so thin that two polite gentlemen kept a conversation about geology running on and on so as not to be "master of many a forbidden family topic" of the couple housed next door. In the seventies, hotel guests would have

even more plaguing problems. Those lucky enough to have single beds and rooms to themselves would still have company. A newspaper editor wrote at that time that "Bedbugs are so thick down town that the fellows sleeping in single beds can hardly stand them. Some of them take chunks of raw beef to bed with them to give the bugs a chance to feed." [14]

Yet, the town was loved—crowded, filthy, and verminous as she was. One early-day resident, reminiscing from Helena in 1869 (by which time the town was being referred to as "Old Virginia"—a legend at six years old) wrote, "It is pre-eminently a city of happy memories. Who, in these later years, has lived within and left it, but cherishes the happiest recollections of Virginia?" [15] Thomas Dimsdale wrote in a similar vein, "We have travelled far and seen much of the world, and the result of our experience is a love for our mountain home that time and change of scene can never efface." One emigrant so loved her, he thought her beautiful, and described her as he first saw her, saying, "If we expected to see a sprawling town of shacks we were doomed to disappointment. Instead, an orderly village of neat log and frame buildings nestled in a sheltered basin . . . a tiny stream . . ." [16]

The natural beauty of the surrounding country must have moved all but the most molelike miner. The six miles of gulch above town wind through steep hillsides of pine and Douglas fir, with occasional hollows filled with quaking aspen. At the head of the gulch, little mountain meadows hang under the cliffs of Old Baldy. The three-mile ride from the head of Daylight Creek to the top of the ridge above town rewarded the rider with the blue, now blue-purple, now dull green view of the peaks of the Madison Range across the valley of the Madison River. From the ridge, looking back, the Ruby Mountains, sixteen miles away, looked like cardboard cutouts, toy mountains for a children's theater.

Up the Madison River, so far as to sometimes appear

cloud-like on the horizon, were the peaks of the strange country surrounding the headwaters of the Yellowstone. A few venturesome b'hoys had penetrated this place and had come home visibly shaken, telling tales of fountains of steaming hot water, of a smell of sulphur, and of hollow ground that shook, roared, and trembled underfoot. (By the early seventies, everyone would be making the trip to see for themselves, and the most popular local song would be "I Want To Go Where the Geysers Go," and the place would be the first National Park.)

Sunsets here beat anything a man ever saw back home, some nights filling the whole sky with color. And the special sunset that came sometimes after a rain, when the sun dropped into a slit between purple clouds and skyline, gilding rough lumber buildings with colored light, redoing the dull hillside in bold-lighted rock and juniper against purple-shadowed gullies. . . . The town stopped for a while to admire its own beauty.

To men used to the everlasting winter and the deep snows of the East, or to the gray days and miserable, bone-chilling dampness of the Midwestern river bottoms, the Rocky Mountain winter was a surprise. Sunning oneself in shirt sleeves on a south slope in January was an unexpected pleasure. Deep snow was for the higher elevations; here, at 6000 feet, there was rarely more than six inches on the ground. Here, during a cold snap, though the temperature dropped out of sight on Eastern thermometers calibrated to only thirty below, the b'hoys commented that they didn't notice the cold as they did at home, and often worked out in such weather (sometimes freezing fingers and toes because they hadn't felt the cold). It was a great time for joshing about buying whisky by the chunk, until the chinook wind blew in from the southwest, raising the temperature eighty degrees overnight, evaporating the snow, leaving the ground bare, the weather mild.

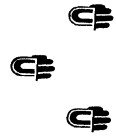
Summers were made up of warm days, seldom too hot,

and nights blissfully cool, just right for sleeping. No more sweltering through a muggy, pitchblack night of July. There were no fireflies to enchant a summer evening, but overhead were stars close enough for the plucking.

Indian summer commonly lasted until Christmas. Spring never came, as elsewhere, but here the squally snows of April, the sudden snowstorms of May, the soggy ones of early June were things to be endured for the sake of the tolerable weather of the rest of the year.

Near-by natural beauty there was in abundance. Climate was better than some places, worse than others. Some even thought the town charming. But it must be admitted that they loved her not so much for her beauty, as for what she gave each man. In Dimsdale's words again, "The one great blessing is perfect freedom. . . . Everyone does what pleases him best."

CHAPTER SEVEN



FREE ENTERPRISE IN ALDER GULCH

DOZENS OF MEN came to Alder Gulch and never worked a claim. Moses Stubbs taught "fancy dancing" in Stonewall Hall every Tuesday and Thursday evening to all the fellows who longed for the tender delights of the hurdy-gurdy, but needed instruction. Business was so good he had to advertise for help: "Wanted—A DANCING MASTER—None need apply, unless capable of teaching the latest fashionable dances." Singing school was held by blacksmith Jess Armitage once a week. Mr. Hammel and "Monsieur Beuregard, from Paris" taught French, the latter teaching the language "with Parisian purity." Professor Toffts painted views of the city and surrounding country, selling them to the local residents. DeWaugh's band was available for dances, funerals, or social affairs, and played for every performance at the theater. Old Brod, ex-Negro slave, made enough blacking boots to lose $50,000 on the New York stock market. A. M. Smith's photo studio over Con Orem's Saloon was "as profitable as a 'claim' in the bed of Alder Gulch." Daguerrotypes sold for five dollars each, and most all the b'hoys wanted to send their frontier likeness back home—pistoled (with borrowed

firearms?) and grim—to prove to stay-at-homes that they were veritable Nimrod Wildfires.

There was a market for most any ability in Virginia City. Little capital was needed; the important thing was to have a ready eye for opportunity and a spry wit. Some men saw the possibilities in using up the wagons in camp, wagons left standing where the oxen had stepped from the traces for the last time, abandoned by men who had no room to store them on their claims, by men who intended to take their dust home by stagecoach. Shrewd men manufactured pick handles from wagon spokes and made old wagon tires into pick eyes for the b'hoys.

Each man did the opportune thing, trying one idea for a while until it played out, and then tackling another sure thing. For a while whip-sawing was a good business. Two good men could whip-saw 100 feet a day at seventy-five cents a foot. At another time, hunting game for one of the many butcher shops in town was profitable, and wagonloads of elk, moose, deer and buffalo carcasses entered town. One man, Professor Ward, gathered skins of these slaughtered animals for sale to Eastern museums. Two entrepreneurs furnished the city with ice: C. W. White guaranteed 200,000 pounds of Crystal Lake ice delivered "cheaper than any other White man and live" while Louis Romey's Pine Lake ice was "warranted pure and free from all Slaughter-House drainings."

Craftsmen, especially, found a market for their skills in Virginia City. Of these, the most important to the thirsty b'hoys were the brewers, the men who could produce malt from barley and ferment it with sugar and hops to make beer they could buy for two dollars a gallon. The b'hoys drank enough of it to keep three breweries busy, Mannheim's and Gilbert's in Virginia City and Scheffler's in Nevada City. Beer and sweet highballs were their favorite drinks; the straight shot, downed in so many thousands of gulps on the movie and

television screens, was drunk when winter shortages of sugar forced it on unwilling palates.

Many barkeeps kept a still dripping in the back room, and anyone of them worth his salt knew how to add a little cut plug to this batch of raw alcohol or cinnamon root to the next to produce "brandy," "rye," or "bourbon" as needed. The best of these recipes produced a Stinkingwater Brand of whisky for which the b'hoys would shell out seven dollars a gallon—two dollars per gallon more than they were willing to pay for the cheapest "imported" rotgut. Good barkeeps also knew to the ounce how much cutting good whisky would take. Many a barrel of whisky on the back of a mule ended up as two barrels on the back of a bar.

"Encourage Home Manufacture," pleaded the advertisement of the local candlestick maker, "save its freight hither and have a first rate article." It was a good argument. The *Montana Post* got behind the movement and soon everything from soap to combs made from native Montana horn was being made and sold in Alder Gulch.

A candy maker set up his kitchen on Wallace Street just above Content Corner. Several bakery signs appeared on the street, behind which the floury proprietor usually served liquor with his pies. Sometimes a man "went down to the bakery to have a drink."

The blacksmith in Virginia City had things so good he had the gall to close his smithy on Sunday, knowing full well it would make no difference to his trade on Monday. He was in special demand, not only as shoer of animals and rimmer of wheels, but also as manufacturer, turning out everything from the plows needed by miner-turned-farmer to the parts needed for the first quartz mills (the one at Summit was entirely handmade). Each blacksmith claimed he could hammer out a shoe better and faster than any other smith in the gulch. Forging contests were frequent.

There were other smiths in town, smiths whose anvils didn't ring from morn till dark, smiths who couldn't shoe a horse or weld a broken wheel shaft, the goldsmiths. Three of them came to town to melt its gold into gee-gaws for the b'hoys. At their neat work benches they fashioned gold fresh from the claim into bold watch chains, or showed off that unique nugget on a conversation piece of a stickpin, or chased pretty earrings for the girl he'd left behind. They created some of the few bits of beauty in the town.

Leather was the most necessary material on the frontier, furnishing the hinges on the miner's door as well as his latch string—and sometimes his winter underwear. Passengers in A. J. Oliver's coaches were cushioned from the rough roads by the soft springing action of the leather thoroughbraces. Drive belts for crude water-powered machines were leather. Shoemakers, saddle and harness makers were as busy as they wanted to be. A tannery on the Stinkingwater furnished leather to them at considerably less than the imported stuff, using the hides from hundreds of oxen who had pulled wagons into the Territory.

Stone masons quarried local stone and raised native-stone buildings, the stones so skillfully fitted that their adobe-mud mortar still cements their walls firmly in place. Cabinet makers furnished the new buildings with fine rosewood and mahogany furniture "in the best style and of the most excellent pattern that can be procured." They advertised that they could also furnish billiard balls as well as "coffins on short notice." Tinsmiths fashioned buckets, stoves and chimneys by the hundreds.

Virginia City, then, could produce almost anything she needed. She had to, for she was a long way from the factories of the East. She was able to, for her craftsmen could easily compete with the high freight rates necessary to bring in

ready-made goods. They were busy; they could afford to hire help.

Jobs were plentiful in the early days of Virginia City, though the jobs were not always just what a person had been looking for, "People of means at home, working as day laborers, taking in washing," and "clergymen's most prized relatives" tending bar. But callused laboring hands here made money tantamount to that made by soft, professional hands at home.

Wages were five times higher than in the East. Miners were paid the premium wages of six dollars to eight dollars per day. Bookkeeper clerks made as high as $175 a month. Newspaper employees drew forty-five dollars per week, teamsters and laborers, fifty dollars per month plus board and room.[1] Contrary to expectations, living costs were not nearly so high in proportion. The *Montana Post* in 1867 placed the living cost at not more than ten per cent higher than in the East, and, in the same year, Bishop Tuttle wrote his wife that prices were not outrageously high. Flour, sugar, and coffee sold for thirteen cents, forty cents, and forty cents a pound, wholesale in Montana, and for seven cents, thirteen cents, and twenty-one cents in New York—only twice as high.[2] There was considerable fluctuation in prices according to season, of course, but it was estimated that a family could live for $1800 per year[3]—which was just about the average workingman's income.

There was a great variation in labor supply, which should have produced a corresponding fluctuation in wages. The market was flooded in the summer months by the waves of emigrants arriving; it dried up in the winter, when the worker, fearful of the high cost of lying idle, headed for home. Yet summer wages remained constant in spite of this annual inundation. Partly, this was so because more men were needed during the summer, but also it was true because experienced

miners were hard to find and because honest men were at a premium both in the mines and in town.

There was actually a labor shortage in town during the mining season, enough so that it provided employment for a one-man employment agency. According to the *Post,* he was often hard put to it to persuade the independent miner to get to work: "He appears to think that mining pursuits lead to dropsy . . . upon overtaking a miner he immediately 'taps' him on the back. Some times he is successful, but occasionally he is requested to visit a place of much warmer climate than this is." [4]

Such independence was galling to employers who were anxious to grab their fortune and were being held up because of no help. The paper wagged the editorial club over these recalcitrant miners' heads by threatening to hire foreigners (Chinese) if wages continued at the same high rate, swearing that it was too much to be submitted to.[5] The editor might have saved ink, for the b'hoys did as they pleased, wages remained high, and the owners dared not put Chinese in the mines.

Employers also had difficulty finding honest men whom they could allow to handle big sums of money, or intelligent, educated men whom they could allow to make decisions. Anton Holter discovered this when a trusted employee absconded with funds, forcing him to work almost around the clock, because there was no one he could hire to take the man's place. Young Jim Miller, bookkeeper and clerk for John Rockfellow, found that his employer would pay him anything within reason and give him speculation privileges, even storing goods for him, in order to keep him from other store owners who tried to entice him away.

Men as sure of their jobs as Virginia City workers were could afford to work when they wanted. A man could feel free to turn down the flabbergasting offer of $250 a month for

bartending, if he just didn't feel like bartending right then. Such workers could afford to try another gulch, if they thought they could do better there. A steady job meant little to b'hoys who had their ears attuned to pick up the faintest whisper of excitement over a new strike. They threw down their picks, took off their aprons, tossed away their tin-snips and piled out of town rather than let anyone get to a newly rumored good thing before them, sometimes following the new trail all night by matchlight. They left employers fuming, mines all but closed down, sawmills not turning a wheel, for want of help. They slid out from under the speculations merchants had built upon them, leaving the storekeeper sitting on nothing but the hopes that had brought him there.

The stampede was an infuriating thing to men with a vested interest in Virginia City. City elders made every effort to play down any rumor of new gold strikes, the newspaper being their chief ally in admonishing workers not to be misled by the rainbow's end. When gold was discovered on Blackfoot Creek, the *Post* printed "this latest blast of . . . (Rumor's) . . . trumpet" and wondered about "the exact locality of this ten thousandth edition of El Dorado." During the gold excitement on the Kootenai in 1864, the *Post* reported nothing doing there and said that Mr. Grimes of Oliver & Company had written that many were speaking of "coming back to a sure thing"—Virginia City, of course.[6]

The editor and businessmen were not being entirely selfish in this pooh-poohing of rumored gold strikes, for far too many of them were wild-goose chases. One in 1864, particularly depopulated the town. Horses sold at enormous prices, grub, tools, and clothing were freighted out of town, buildings at the new camp contracted for—all over a two-year-old prospect hole with no show of color. The ones who made money from this rush were the men who had goods to sell that would just suit the miner and a dozen mules that could get the stuff to the

new place before wagonloads of stuff could arrive. False rumors circulated by these profiteers started so many gold rushes that the b'hoys devoted a commandment to them in the facetious Miner's Ten Commandments which they passed about the gulch:

> NINTH COMMANDMENT. Thou shalt not tell any false tales about "good diggings in the mountains" to thy neighbor, that thou mayst benefit thy friend who hath mules and provisions and blankets and mining tools he cannot sell; lest in deceiving thy neighbor, when he returneth through the snow with naught save his rifle, he presenteth thee with the contents thereof, and like a dog thou shalt fall down and die.[7]

In spite of the warning, the profiteers continued to break the commandment. They put up canvas stores at every new strike, sold a tent full of goods at swollen prices, and retired temporarily from business until the next stampede found them driving tent stakes where the b'hoys were driving claim stakes.

But being lectured or cheated could not stop the b'hoys from stampeding. They pounded out of town to Blackfoot Creek, to Silver Bow Creek, to McClellan Gulch, or wherever. These strikes established small towns which freighted wagonloads of supplies from Virginia City to new stores. To the surprise of those who had been worried about stampedes, the capital city fattened anew on wholesale business. Then, in 1864, the whopper of a strike at Last Chance Gulch siphoned fifty per cent of the Alder Gulch b'hoys over the Boulder hill to the new town of Helena, merchants and manufacturers drawn along with them. Within weeks, Virginia City became "Old Virginia" and every other building in Nevada City had a FOR RENT sign on it. It was a blow from which Virginia City never recovered.

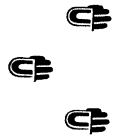
But while the b'hoys of Virginia City were stampeding elsewhere, b'hoys from the East continued to stampede to Alder Gulch, drawn not only by the money to be made here, but by the chance to do work more interesting and which called for a lot more from him than many available jobs in the East. Knocking about a mining camp forced a man to use his head. He learned to set timbers and spiling solidly against the unstable sands or died because of his ignorance. If he had never sawed a rafter before, yet found a job as a carpenter, he was soon using a framing square like an old hand. He became the jack-of-all-trades that every frontiersman had to be and figured out how to blacksmith a little, to hew a little, to cook a little, to turn a hand almost anywhere. He was on his own. More so than if he'd stayed at home. His alertness and his ability were noticed by a government observer, who wrote in a report on the mineral resources of Montana: "The average miner of all the new Territories is far superior, both in natural intelligence and acquired knowledge, to the laborers of the older States." [8] His term, miner, could be expanded to include all the laboring force of the new Territories. It was a wonderful thing for men to expand, to be free of the routine jobs of the stagnant East.

Coupled with the satisfaction of doing challenging work was the new sensation of enjoying work that cut across class barriers. In the gulch and in Virginia City, a b'hoy was not forced to be with and work with clerks only, if he was a clerk, or with roustabouts only, if he was a roustabout. Chances were he worked shoulder to shoulder with his boss; chances were he picked up from him words, ideas, and attitudes he'd never heard of before. If he was pleasant company, he became acquainted with friends of the boss, men he would not have met at home, literary men, military men, engineers, lawyers, and leading merchants. He truly felt the equal of anyone in camp.

Such affluence, such generosity, gave Virginia City a spe-

cial place in the hearts of all who lived there. The town could afford to hire men at decent wages, could afford luxuries which other towns could not, could afford leisure for big parties and big dreams. And of these things, the dreams were important, for the b'hoys had come closer to gaining them (the dreams of the Gilded Age) than if they'd stayed at home. Though they suffered hardship and were often broke, they had paid twenty-five cents for an orange and one dollar a pound for flour, prices to be afforded only by millionaires.

CHAPTER EIGHT



THE VIRGINIA CITY "NIGHTHERD"

THE WORST ENEMY of b'hoys able to do what pleased them best and with dreams partially realized was, strangely enough, boredom—especially in the winter. When frozen ground idled the miner, troubles began, not because of the cold, but because every morning a b'hoy had to make the same decision: What'll I do today? Mebbe he'd read that dog-eared copy of *David Copperfield* he'd just managed to borrow, but his eyes were still sore from reading by candle light last night. Mebbe he'd take his sled and go coasting down Van Buren Street hill, that'd use up a couple of hours. Chopping wood might fill the morning; if not, he could go skating once more on one of the frozen ponds. Tonight? Bowling? Nope, not at those prices. Billiards? Not for the twenty-third straight night. Hurdy-gurdy? The girls were ugly and the drinks hogwash.

Mebbe the boys from other gulches called this dump the "Social City," but they didn't live here. This was a dead town —even the newspaper admitted it:

> We are enjoying the dullest time in the evening amusements line, we have had the misfortune to witness since

> our arrival in this otherwise fast town. No theatre, no negro minstrels, no balls, no nothings. Can't somebody get up a nice dance, such as we had the pleasure of witnessing a month or so ago. Where do you go these long evenings?[1]

A tiny cabin with dirt floor and muslin windows was a boresome place, no matter how snug. The filth of inadequate housecleaning drove most men to town instead of to cleaning. (Miners' cabins were so dirty a woman abhorred having to move into a place that had been bached in.)

Gambling, sleighing, singing in a glee club, hunting, fishing, none of them were any good to a man who needed a woman. Nothin' but busywork they were, busywork to keep a man's mind from continually climbing into bed with a woman. The fancy girls at the bottom of the street were useful, but the whang-bang of their professionalism left a man restless for a real woman.

For men with wives left behind, men like Isaac Rogers, storekeeper, the dead calm of the Virginia City winter was a torture of morbid longing. Rogers wrote down his blues, a daily notation of self-pity during the day and of erotic dreams of his wife each night—a diary which stopped short the day his wife arrived.[2]

Frustrated men were edgy men, downright mean at times. In the summertime, they sweated the meanness out by swinging a pick; in the wintertime, they drowned it out by swallowing alcohol—but it wouldn't stay drowned, and on some winter nights a saloon-full of b'hoys mauled each other, creating a hooraw which could be heard all over town. Bartenders used slungshots and bungstarters freely to break it up; next day there were sore heads and black eyes around, but the whole town felt better for the excitement.

Now and then, old wounds chafed to where the soreness could be soothed only by a grudge fight, and a couple of

b'hoys on the prod would shoot at each other. Sometimes they wounded each other but the obituary notices of the *Montana Post* show very few deaths occurring from barroom brawling. (Similarly, the paper records few brawls during the summer months, when the b'hoys were too tired to come to town, too busy to drink.) Alcohol is not a good fighting partner for a man intent on murder.

Those who had experienced the finer things of mid-nineteenth-century life in the East tried to establish some of these institutions and customs in the crude little town to help while away the winter. They organized into debating societies and argued such questions as "Resolved: The Love of Woman has more influence on the mind of man than the love of gold." They got up mock lectures in which the fattest man in these parts expounded on "How to Get Fat." Dramatic societies presented Shakespearean tragedies and Sheridan comedies. Glee clubs sang upon occasion. Brass bands organized, played a serenade or two and died. Literary societies flourished and withered each winter after listening to one of Judge Hosmer's presentations of the reasons Bacon was Shakespeare. Leading citizens organized social events of the coming season with all the aplomb of a "four hundred."

Any affair was well attended. In fact, the upper floor of Stonewall Hall was so crowded at a meeting one night, it began to buckle "with a most exciting crash," causing some of the crowd to jump over the bannisters and land on the heads of those who were jamming the one stairwell. When the damage was repaired the whole crowd went back upstairs again to finish the meeting, weak floor or no weak floor.

These organized social affairs made the place seem a little like a home. They gave the transient camp an aura of permanence, but they did little for the majority of men who lived here. The b'hoys still had to make their own fun.

And they did. They were full of high spirits, and their fun

was rough. The saloons were their meeting place and practical joking their avocation. Their membership included most of the men who in their most sobersided moments attended Judge Hosmer's literary lectures (before coming to town he had written the popular novel, *The Octoroon*). Night or day, occasionally their dern foolishness became so infectious that the whole town would explode into comic activity. Because they ne'er went home until morning, some wag dubbed them the "Nightherd."

Their restless, comic activity was what gave the town its personality, the personality of mining camps the West over. A good laugh came to be revered; comedy was the essence of the times:

> A fantastic mood was abroad that took closely colored and earthy forms . . . A wild hilarity prevailed without the familiar check, without the familiar descent into other communal emotions . . . Personal ties had been cut: a deep sentiment, a vast sentimentalism, overflowed along with hilarity. . . . The current mood . . . was comic. . . . With all the vicissitudes, the heartbreak, the losses, the abundance of human failure, the comic mood arose irresistibly.[3]

Constance Rourke is here speaking of the California miner, but it is equally true of Montana. Laughter was the best medicine for the rigors of Alder Gulch.

The very idiom of the Nightherd was designed for comic effect; a practical joke upon the language, upon the listener and upon the situation. For instance: if a man had "woodbined" he had died—"Gone where the woodbine coileth"; if a man was a "toozlecompoop," he was always sticking his nose in other people's business; if he started a new enterprise of any sort, he was learning to "run the machine." A real go-getter was a man who did "business in a minute! Most prev-

alent man in the camp was "the man in the wagon"—he was the author of all rumor.

A simple "No" was not enough for the b'hoys. If one of them declined something he was liable to say, "I ain't on it," or "I don't go a cent on that," or "None of that in mine." On the other hand, if someone said, "Take it Bob, take it," it was an affirmative meaning, "I'll have another drink." If he had too many he was "geysered."

A fellow a b'hoy couldn't cotton to was "panned out and couldn't get a color." Chances are that the fellow was told "There's no weight in your coattails," which meant to git on about your business. With this a "gravel" probably started, which ended up in a fight in which one or the other was "cleaned out to bedrock."

One saying in particular explains the town and its attitude. It was the laconic "Some things can be done as well as others."

The Nightherd watched the doings of the more sedate men about town with a cynical eye, pulling a leg here and there when they were being especially serious, playing a lively counterpoint to their largo. When all the serious planners and organizers were stirring up the town with their cries of "Injun" and attempting to coerce "volunteers" for a militia, the b'hoys rigged up John How's black mastiff with Indian hat and feathers and bedecked him with a sign "Recruits Wanted."

If some musicians formed a band, the next night "the Calithumpians" were out parading with tubs, kettles and other clangorous instruments. If a notorious tightwad refused to buy a new hat, the b'hoys saw to it that he received a decrepit headpiece every day as a gift until he got the idea.

When there hadn't been a hanging in some time, the b'hoys spread the rumor that two men had been strung up during the night. Everyone except the Vigilantes and the jokesters deserted the town to search for the bodies. From ceme-

tery hill they could be seen "in ravines on the hillsides, as far as a ten pounder would throw a shell, the white surface of the snow was dotted with merchants, lawyers, clerks, mechanics, representatives, loafers and dogs . . ."

They were especially fond of pranks on sleepers. Men apt to doze in public did so only once, for the favorite means of awakening such a snoozer was by inserting an oil-soaked cork in his nostril and setting it afire, scaring the poor man into thinking "he was a victim of spontaneous combustion." A variation on the prank was to "embellish the protuberant nasal organ of the slumberer with a split cork full of matches," lighting same, "and in an instant the frontispiece of the little dozy presented the appearance of the patent head-light on a locomotive." Dr. Nichols, "the-up-town Dentist," played another variation on this theme by waking a loafer found sleeping in his chair by yanking out a tooth with his pliers. Quoth the *Post,* "The joke is too good to lose, if the tooth was not."

Such simple-minded stunts have ever been the delight of the human herd. It serves a purpose, culling automatically those who don't belong with a certain band as surely as a battery of tests. It had a therapeutic value in the lonely mountain town by helping to break the monotony and diminishing the danger of cabin fever and real trouble.

Retribution to evildoers was a very special kind of practical joke; it taught a lesson and provided a laugh at the same time.

Such a never-to-be-forgotten lesson was the explosion of the stove because the fuel stolen from another man's woodpile had been booby-trapped by drilling out a core and re-filling said core with gunpowder. Such a prank was known to backfire when an absent-minded Guy Fawkes forgot which one was loaded and fired up his own stove with his own booby-trap.

Bluffs and blowhards who loved to swagger about armed and blustering were apt to have their bluff called. When such a

citizen announced he was leaving Deer Lodge once upon a time, "a few of the citizens concluded that in honor of his departure, they would give him a farewell dose. So the ball went on, and at the point of a knife, with both hands elevated above his head, 'danced all night till broad day-light,' with permission to leave the country the next morning." [4]

To such a gang that once-a-year celebration on April 1st was a godsend—not that they needed it, but it did add an extra fillip to the year. And even the non-inventive could get into the act, strewing the usual purses on sidewalks and sending mysterious packages filled with hay on which there were enormous express charges. Bottomless whisky bottles were the rage one All Fool's Day. Barkeeps asked to fill such a bottle wasted considerable liquor trying to decide where the level mark was—with whisky at eight dollars a gallon. Madder were the merchants who tried filling such bottles with kerosene which retailed at twice as much.

Most tenderfeet found the b'hoys' welcome a little too warm in spite of the *Post*'s hearty greeting to greenhorns: "If . . . you catch the sound of 'pilgrim,' 'tender foot,' 'fresh fish,' etc. as you pass through our streets, laugh it off, for it is not meant in derision but said from force of habit; for our old mountaineers have hearts as big as all outdoors, and will bid you as warm a welcome as you could wish." [5] Perhaps—but many a poor lad was put on a horse too much for him where "the exercise was invigorating, but the ride didn't amount to much." Other greenies found their hats flying down street at the end of fishhook and line.

An innocent newspaper reporter was especially good pickings. One such was sent rushing up the street to see "an immense brick from the Kennet Lode." It proved to be a brick and it *was* "some distance from the Kennet Lode." At another time he, and half the town, rushed up the rocky butte opposite the foot of town to see the volcano, the smoke of which was

issuing from between the rocks, only to discover another sell. The crowning blow was his walk of a mile to see a "cherry colored cat." He found one black as a crow, which the prankster explained by remarking, "black cherries." "Local" announced in a special item in the paper that he'd had enough of it.

A notable member of the Nightherd was round-faced, chunky X. Beidler, detective, messenger, bill collector and man hunter, he who had made his reputation as a cool customer back in the "old days" of the first Vigilance Committee. X. could usually be found with the b'hoys, swapping yarns in the most popular saloon in any town. He was a great traveler, dropping in here and there for a day or so on mysterious business which he always referred to as "looking for tracks." One time he rode 600 miles in eight days. If not on business, he appeared in all of his sartorial elegance, sporting a cane and beaver hat, his suit black, new and well cut. If on business, his well-known campaign hat, with brim so deep it hid his eyes, making him appear all hat and walrus mustache, signaled his sojourn in town—one paper announcing his visit so: "The big hat (accompanied by "X.") visited our burgh last week." A showman to the Nth degree, Beidler knew the value of his cognomen, X., and used it when introducing himself—but alone, never with a surname. Copywriters loved the title: commenting on his clothes, the *Post* said he "goes into winter quarters, expensively, exquisitely, extatically, exactly—X."

If not on business, he was usually a few days later than expected getting out of town, for his coming was a signal for a party, and all the sports in town gathered around to hear the news from this latter-day strolling mummer, to hear what new stories he had collected or concocted and to hear once more his yarns about his grasshopper threshing machine. "The little one," as he was sometimes affectionately known,

had a way with the language and his phrase, "grease your boots," meaning *scram,* was the rage of Wallace Street for some time. He murdered the b'hoys by quipping an answer to where he caught all those fish—"In the water." He became as enigmatic as his name, some papers referring to him as "the unknown quantity." If some toozlecompoop wanted to know where he was off to his stock answer was "don't know"—and he was going there to "see what he could see." Such mysteriousness only added to his appeal to the Nightherd.

X. could do no wrong in their eyes except for one little fault: he tended to grow repetitious in his yarns about the hangings of the road agents (he was one Vigilante who openly admitted his membership in the group). He loved to talk of the days of '64, a weakness that grew downright irritating come the twenty-fifth re-telling. The Virginia City b'hoys thought up a cure.

One night, just before Christmas in 1867, Beidler wandered into the El Sol Saloon, popular Wallace Street hangout. A dozen or so of the b'hoys hallooed him and called him over for a tot of Christmas cheer. Aglow with the spirit of the season, he agreed to tell them once more the story "that occurred up country in more dangerous days." Drink in hand, he launched into this, his favorite yarn. He had only started when one of the gang yawned profusely, mumbled and wandered off to the far corner of the room. Somewhat surprised, X. continued, only to have another rude yawn punctuate the tale and still another crony desert him. One by one, his other listeners followed suit, leaving him with nary an ear to hear the tale. Mad at first, he soon divined it a capital sell and eagerly joined the gang, waiting to trap the next comer with the same gag, seemingly enjoying the joke as much as the next man, but secretly biding his time, waiting for his revenge, diamond cut diamond.

His chance came a few days later, on Saturday. Judd, the

famous outlaw, had just been captured and was in the local calaboose enjoying the bread and water which decree fed all prisoners. X. found his victims having an afternoon drink and "by knowing looks, and half spoken innuendos, he created quite a desire among a party of gentlemen to see Judd, now in jail." X. agreed to take them down to the jail if they really wanted to see the notorious one. They jumped at the chance. On pretense of showing them the cells, X. maneuvered the whole group into one, then, quickly stepping outside, slammed the door shut and turned the key, imprisoning the lot of them. "Sticking his handsome phiz against the grating, said: 'Boys, I believe while I have time and everything is favorable, I will finish that little story of mine.' " And he finished it—adding for good measure a chapter of the *Vigilantes* (Dimsdale's) and a few pages from Chesterfield.

X.'s revenge was secure, but the gag itself grew into proportions of a stampede, by which moniker it was known about the streets. A body could hardly stop to greet an acquaintance on the street but what he was yawned at and cut off in midsentence. Facetiously, the choir expected the congregation to leave on the first bars of the anthem at Sunday's church service, and Mr. Langrishe swore he would forego *Othello* at the theater "lest the audience will break in the first line of 'Othello's apology.' "[6]

The meanest prank concocted by the Nightherd was played on a would-be poet, of all people. Poor David Cowan, a burr-tongued, Scotch attorney-at-law somehow never did set well with the b'hoys. He had at one time come into town with the claim of a fabulous ore discovery of some kind, all because his compass had spun crazily while crossing the Jefferson River on the ice. This had made him a laughingstock. Most irritating was Cowan's pretense as a versifier, not only as a versifier, but as a second Bobby Burns. Now many of the lads about town scrawled off a bit of verse now and then, and even

had their rhyming printed in the paper, but Cowan's claims to poesy was even slimmer than theirs. Perhaps a sample of his work will suffice to pinpoint their aggravation with him and his work. The following appeared in the *Montana Democrat* just before Cowan's downfall, with the comment "The author has evidently developed a latent genius and discovered the destiny nature has worked out for him."

I see the ploughman at his work,
In spring-time now so early.
He's stripp'd at it in his shirt,
On the Madison Valley.

The sower next behind him comes,
And scatters grain full plenty;
The ox before the harrow goes
And covers it so gently.

Fear not, ye honest husbandmen,
The earth's as true as ever;
Then do not put your trust in men,
But in God and the river.

Showers of rain may not come down
Upon your lovely valley,
When first you want the sprinkling done
Upon your oats and barley.

But God is good to every one,
No matter what his nation,
Then trust Him and the Madison
For water irregation.

So keep to work; the soil is rich,
Of our vast Territory,
Montana's hills and vales, of which
You'll never need be sorry.[7]

As Bishop Tuttle commented, the man "flung off verses."

Their lesson to such overblown posturing was to invite the poor devil to give a public reading of his poetry at the theater, for admission, proceeds to be turned over to the poor. When Cowan doubted they could procure the theater, they solemnly assured him they could for "it was obtained for a dogfight Wednesday."

Delighted with the prospect of a public hearing, Cowan accepted the invitation, in verse:

> My muse is young and cannot fly,
> Not having fledged a wing yet;
> But by that time she may comply
> And give us all a Tune yet.
> That sound it will,
> Around each hill,
> And o'er our streams and valleys, yet
> I shall endeavor to conjure up,
> 1st, Something suitable to the occasion;
> 2d, Something local and perhaps jocular;
> 3rd, Something relating to miners and farmers.
> I am, gentlemen,
> Yours, most respectfully,
> DAVID COWAN.[8]

The b'hoys generously gave their sucker a full month to prepare his one-man show. They spent the time giving him every encouragement, egging him on, even selling advance tickets to the performance for him, meanwhile making plans of their own.

The house smelled something fierce that April Thursday night with the aroma of high cabbage and sundry other putrefying vegetables, but Cowan, wrapped in the arms of his Muse, was oblivious to all but his great chance. He should have

taken heed of his own poetic advice, "put not your trust in men." He had only barely started when loud applause broke forth, drowning out his every word, "whistles, locusts, trumpets, gongs, tin pans, and those accompanied by merry shouts of laughter saluted the ears of the poet." When he doggedly persisted, cabbages thunked against the podium, rising from the house at him in great green parabolas. When he could stand no more, he fled from the stage, taking refuge in a nearby hotel room.

The boys had their laugh, but Cowan the next day remained undaunted, claiming that "Burns had been hooted, and Byron hissed, and that all great poets had much tribulation." His proceeds, after paying all expenses, amounted to $106.20, which he conscientiously turned over to Bishop Tuttle for the benefit of the poor. The man was dedicated; he subsequently appeared again that fall repeating his performance of the spring, "where youth, beauty and learning united in the touching tribute," asking only "an impartial hearing by those able to judge." Report has it that coaches coming in that October week were loaded with those who had heard of the first performance and were anxious to "judge" this one. If persistence counts for anything, the man should have been a poet, for a year later once again an item appeared in the *Post* that Cowan "threatens to read another poem . . ."[9]

This particular kind of a gag, a sell upon a performer, was a recurring one amongst the Nightherd of Virginia City. Earlier they had rigged a performance of an original play by a certain Major Alberta, who had starred in his own piece to the cries of "Foul," "Time," etc., and had delighted the crowd with a curtain speech which warned the audience that the play was copyrighted.[10]

Later, a Mr. Hastings, after a first lecture on Mormonism

and Mohammedanism, was encouraged to speak again. The b'hoys came loaded with vegetables to the second lecture, and had charged and fused the podium, as well as loading themselves with fire pumps full of water. Hastings, being an old hand with miners, proved wiser than they, and "wasn't as big a fool as he was fool-looking." He had himself "arranged a little programme and carried it out . . ."

He waited until the crowd was all in and all the money taken. He then collected this, walked up to the lectern, took one look at it and said, "Gentlemen, I find that I have left my manuscript in my room at the hotel; I will go after it and return anon." With which he promptly jumped out the open window at the back of the stage, mounted the waiting horse there and galloped off into the night. Some of the boys made for him but all they got of him was the note he left on the lectern: *Caught at your game—no rotten eggs for me.* The editor of the *Madisonian* hooted at the b'hoys—for once the foolers fooled—and said to his readers, "Anyone meeting the gentleman will please give him a half dollar for us; we paid him a half, but consider the joke worth double admittance."

The b'hoys were left with a nice stock of firecrackers and rotten cabbage and eggs. They didn't try to use them. They were a little tired of them. With good grace and a wry laugh they ran the following ad disposing of them:

> BELOW COST.—The undersigned having been sold, are now offering for sale below cost, the best assortment of fireworks ever brought to this city. Our stock consists in part of fire-crackers, serpents, torpedoes, rockets, &c. &. We have also on hand a large lot of first quality rotten eggs and cabbage; also a squirt pump, the same formerly used at the Stonewall.
>
> Having been disappointed in a late enterprise, we have soured on the country, and are determined to close out and

emigrate to Peace River. If you wish to see us alive, call early.

George Mitchelum.
We were betrayed James Farrellum
Thomas Toddy & Co.

Tickets to the Hasting's lecture can be procured of James Mitch, Esq. of the marble front. A few of those nice eggs on hand. For fireworks, pumps, and gongs, call at the above stand.[11]

CHAPTER NINE

TOLL ROADS AND FREIGHTERS

IT WAS A LONG, long way to Virginia City from any direction a man tried to get to her. From almost anywhere, it looked as if "you can't get there from here," and for part of the year that was often true. Only the man on foot, on snowshoes, made it, especially so during the winter of '64, when Morley noted: "Owing to the deep snow . . . the mail agent has employed footmen to carry the mails from here over the range, nearly a hundred miles." That same winter it was necessary to send a man by foot over the mountains to Lewiston, Idaho Territory, to procure a copy of Idaho Statutes that could serve as a guide to the freshman legislature about to convene in Bannack. He walked the 1400 snowy miles in less than forty days.

Because the town was so far from any source of supply, because the way was rugged, the hauling season short, and because the miner had the dust to pay for having his wants catered to, freighting soon became one of the biggest businesses in the Territory. The miners needed picks, shovels, and powder. They used pills and pomades and patent medicines. For some, life could only be sustained by tobacco; others

found life impossible without liquor. Things to build needed nails; things to mend needed bar iron. Goods had to be moved from one excitement to another. People wanted news from home, wanted to send things home, wanted to-get-the-hell-out-of-this-Godforsaken-country. If a man didn't have a bonanza of a claim, the odds were that he could do better supplying these wants than dabbling in his muddy holdings.

It took a good many men to wrangle freight the grueling, mountainous miles to Virginia City. In 1866, the year when the Territory was deluged with freighters, it was estimated that "twenty-five hundred men, three thousand teams and twenty thousand oxen and mules are employed in conveying freight from that sea-port [Fort Benton] to the mining towns . . ."[1] Freight coming in from Salt Lake that spring moved in a 400-mile string of wagons, as many as a thousand wagons rolling at one time (about two and a half a mile).

At the same time freighters and speculators in every direction around her loaded crates labeled *Virginia City, M. T.* Men in Portland, Oregon Territory, reckoned they were the closest seaport and sent freight up the Columbia River, then overland across the Army's Mullan Road to Montana. Men in Sacramento freighted goods to the terminus of the Pacific Railroad, then down the Truckee River, past Boise and into Virginia City. San Francisco and Los Angeles wholesalers sold goods to speculators whose wagons were pointed northeast. Pikes Peakers left Denver with goods destined for Alder Gulch. Men in Minnesota joined the last Fisk expedition and came through the Sioux of Dakota Territory to profit from the gold of Montana. The *Post* once estimated that 800 pack animals were headed her way, but in the same issue threw up its hands in despair and said freight was coming in from every direction and there was no way to keep track.

If there were 2500 men working the freight that had come up the river by steamboat, another 2500 must have been

handling overland freight, for it was estimated that half of the goods entering the Territory came by river and the other half overland.[2] In other words, it took as many men to freight goods to the miner, as it took men to work the mines—perhaps more. They transported $12 million in goods that year of 1866.[3]

Virginia City was rather proud of her remoteness; it made the fact of her growth a phenomenon which her citizens felt they had accomplished by their own efforts. The chest-thumping *Montana Post* in its fourth issue smugly bragged:

> A more unpropitious locality could scarcely be imagined . . . Sixteen hundred miles north-west of what, in our day, was the "far west," no ocean to waft the tide of commerce to its bosom; no ample river to roll its burden of commerce to the sea; a city like Virginia in a year and a half! Pshaw! . . . Yet it is so.[4]

But she paid for her remoteness. Goods arrived with fantastic freight charges on them. Miners in Colorado were far closer to the embarkation point for wagon trains, St. Joseph, Missouri (embarkation point it was, for St. Joe seemed an ocean port to all those who had navigated the prairies from its haven or who looked to her for goods and news from home). The silver miners of her namesake city, Virginia City in Nevada, were closer to clipper ship and to railroad train than were Alder Gulch b'hoys whose wagon-freighted stuff "come over land from the Missouri border; average time ninety days; cost per pound from Atchison or Omaha, gold, ten to twenty-five cents; from New York, four to six cents addition." [5] Freight by boat might come up the Missouri in forty-five days; on the other hand, it might take as long as two years in transit.

Her isolation and her needs helped to make her business-

men great travelers. They felt equally at home in Denver and Salt Lake City, traveled the long distances so often that men who lived hundreds of miles apart were close friends, and gossip in one town was the street talk of another.

The isolation of the town made a wagonload of potatoes worth a fortune in June of 1863; it made a storekeeper out of the peddler who trudged up and down the gulch selling needles, pins and buttons from the pack sack he had toted all the way from Salt Lake City; it made a capitalist out of Lloyd Magruder, who sold a pack train of merchandise in town for a profit of $14,000. As in all mining camps, the early flush of sudden wealth and the lack of stores made a market in which a man could sell rubber boots at $38 a pair, and made a mule load of salt from Utah well worth the time and effort of an 800-mile round trip. If a man could get there fustest with the mostest, he could make a killing.

This was especially true in the spring when the b'hoys would pay almost any price to the man who would break their long, monotonous fasting. To hit this early market, a man needed mules. They couldn't carry much, maybe 300 or 400 pounds per animal, but in any weather they could make two trips to an oxen-drawn wagon's one, and in the spring thaw they could leave them even farther behind. They carried big pay loads of many small parcels, in spite of the fact that they were persnickity about their vittles (more so than the muleskinner) and had to carry a little oats for their bellies if they were going to work. Their speed and ability to go where the wagon couldn't made them one of the prime suppliers of the town, especially in hauling freight from Walla Walla. (The towns in the upper gulch, Summit and Highland, were also supplied by a daily pack train in 1864.)

For all his speed, the muleskinner took little of the spring high-grade away from the slower-moving teamster, for he couldn't carry enough to more than whet the b'hoys' appetites;

only goods by the wagonload could quench their winter-ripened wants, and they had newly mined gold to bid for it. If a wagoner knew his business, he headed his wagons into spring snow flurry heaped with flour sacks to fill the nearly empty mining-camp bins. If it arrived in town before the great lots from Fort Benton, the b'hoys might pay him forty-five cents a pound for it. On the other hand, if bad luck put him two weeks behind other wagons, the stuff was worth only fifteen cents a pound to them, sold right over the wagon back (after first taking out a five dollar peddler's license). Any later than this and he would have to sell to stores at lower than wholesale price, or through consignment to one of the auctioneers.

Speculative freight, bought at Salt Lake prices, or better yet, at Missouri prices, on the chance that somebody in Virginia City would buy it at a blown-up price, supplied the town in '63 and '64. Later than that, buyers in Virginia City more often ordered their goods ahead of time from eastern wholesalers, speculating in early spring merchandise themselves. Their Christmas stock came in July—candies, ice skates, mittens and all were unpacked and stored in a "fireproof" at one-fourth of one per cent of their value per month to await their December market.[6]

In spite of this planning ahead, a Missouri b'hoy who was determined to see the Montana elephant could make money carrying liquid to the elephant. A barrel of whisky tucked away in a teetotaler's wagon was a sure-fire seller in Alder Gulch. Staple goods were better freight for the drinking man. Anyone with a new Shuttler wagon and four good mules, who traveled in a good wagon train, could make $1000 on the trip—$225 or more coming from passengers who paid $75 a head for the ride (grub thrown in, of course).[7]

But by 1866 the professional freighter was handling other men's goods and seldom had money invested in the load he

hauled. He owned wagons and hired teamsters to drive the outfits for him. He had a surer thing this way, but, in the spring, he was as hard to deal with as ever. If a storekeeper tried to haggle with the man over a price to get his freight off the docks of Fort Benton, where it was becoming sodden in the May rain, he might just as well have been pleading with George Ives, for all the sympathy he got. No matter what his argument, he was going to be gouged from fifteen cents to twenty cents a pound for freight that a month later the conscienceless teamster would be happy to haul at ten cents a pound.

For freight rates were as variable as the weather. A man paid what he had to to get his goods into Virginia City: in 1866 freight from Walla Walla was moving at thirty to forty cents a pound, while, at the same time, wares coming up the Missouri River and then overland arrived in town at a total cost of only fourteen to eighteen cents a pound.[8] There was no set rate for any trip at any time. One man might pay one rate from Fort Benton, and another man several cents more or less for the same trip. Wagon freight was cheaper than pack mule, but they were both used at the same time over the same route. The difference lay in the kind of goods carried and what a man expected to make from them. When the railroad arrived at Corinne, Utah, in 1869, most goods moved to railhead there and north the 400 miles to Virginia City. Competition was stiff for this short haul, and freight rates stabilized at about ten cents a pound.

Astute John Rockfellow, operating two stores, one in Virginia City and the other in Argenta, near Bannack, beat the freighters at their own game. He bought his own wagons, hired his own teamsters, and brought his goods from Fort Benton when he pleased and at his own price.

The spring race of freight wagons to Virginia City was a contest of turtles plodding twenty miles a day between road

repair stops, wagon repair stops, or stops to shoe animals and to rest them. Worst of all was the mudhole stop where the frost had gone out of the roadway, leaving gumbo, sometimes belly-high on oxen floundering for a foothold against the drag of the wagons glued in place, sometimes crotch-high on a man as he wrestled barrels and crates to dry land in order to lighten the load, sometimes armpit-high as he crouched in the cold muck to dismantle the emptied wagon before pulling it to solid ground piece by piece. An expert freighter, with good luck, *could* make the trip from Salt Lake City in fourteen days (one did in 1866), but more usual was three weeks, plus extra days in the spring. If a freighter wanted to fight the bad mud in the early spring and take a chance on being snowbound in the fall, he could make four round trips a season; more likely was three, taking time out for loading, binges and the like.

If an outfit did get snowed in, there was nothing for it but to camp on the spot the rest of the winter, eating beef from slaughtered oxen, living from supplies in the wagons—unless they were filled with hardware. Come spring, somebody had to go to the nearest corral to purchase more oxen.

The freighter who could afford horse or mule teams asked more for a job than the man with oxen, for he could move things faster. He soon won most of the short-haul freighting, from Fort Benton and Salt Lake, while the ox-driver made the long hauls from St. Joseph where speed didn't matter. the ox driver pulled bigger pay loads because it was unnecessary to fill part of the wagons with grain to feed oxen; they got along on grass.

The teamster's inspired cursing and the cracking of his whip announced his approach long before he could be seen at the foot of Wallace Street, as the whistle and rumble of an approaching railroad train do today. Most any boy in town would have swapped his job for a kingship, especially after

the four-mule team and one wagon multiplied into a sixteen-mule team and three wagons in tandem. Not many kings, as far as they knew, could sit aboard the near wheel horse with such aplomb, wheeling a juggernaut through the tangle of Wallace Street traffic with long jerkline running all the length of those glistening backs to the lead team, a long pull signaling them to turn left, a jerk to take it right a leetle, a whip pop and shout harassing any long-eared so-and-so who loafed on this last pull.

The freighter and the Virginia City merchant dreamed of a Northwest Passage along which to bring goods from the east without wearing a man to a nubbin, on the one hand, or taking such a nick out of profits, on the other hand; some way that would be better than following the old Oregon Trail to Soda Springs, then striking north to Alder Gulch. Many things were wrong with the old road. First of all, it was too long: it formed the base and leg of a right-angled triangle; what was wanted was a route that followed the hypotenuse, that slanted toward Virginia City all the way from Missouri, but still avoided Sioux Territory. An impossibility. Another bad thing about the route was that it forced heavy wagons across the Continental Divide twice, once to the Pacific side at South Pass, back again to the Atlantic side at Monida Pass. What was more, the darn thing was worn out, not much feed for cattle nor brush or chips for fire—too many people been over it since '49. And it was expensive to come that way, a squatter at every crossing, demanding toll for his bridge or ferry, sometimes ten dollars a wagon.

Captain Sawyer's train, eighty-five wagons long, explored a new route to Virginia City in 1865 which crossed no mountains from Missouri to the Yellowstone Crossing, about a hundred miles from town. They came up the South Cheyenne to the Tongue River, then to the Yellowstone, which they followed

to the Crossing. They built road all the way, but they also were delayed thirty days fighting Indians.[9] It saved five hundred miles over going through Salt Lake City, but few freighters used it.

Jim Bridger, the famous mountain man and scout, laid out a route for the b'hoys that just about came up to their dreams. It cut off the Oregon Trail at Laramie, went up to the Yellowstone on the west side of the Big Horn Mountains, then followed the Yellowstone to the gold fields. It didn't follow the diagonal they wanted, and it was rough going in places, but there was lots of water and feed, and it avoided the pesky redskins.

But Jim's notions were pooh-poohed by the new breed of mountain man, the booster, the promoter, the get-rich-quicker, who "could not see much to Bridger—except an ability to sit on a wagon tongue and eat great quantities of sugar, meanwhile entertaining a lot of pilgrims with improbable stories." [10] To him, Jim was an uncivilized, talky old nuisance who claimed it was better to take a little time and avoid the Injuns than to provoke them.

John Bozeman planned a route that pleased the miner better: fast, with good grass and good water, just to the east of the Big Horn Mountains—spang in the middle of Sioux country. It was easier country, physically, for greenhorns to traverse than Bridger's route, but it wasn't any faster (in 1864 Bridger and Bozeman each led wagon trains to Alder Gulch by their respective routes, leaving Laramie at about the same time and arriving in Virginia City at about the same time): the hail of Sioux arrows slowed down travel more than some.

The army built forts along this road to protect the miner, but under-manned and under-supplied them dangerously. The Fetterman massacre in 1867, in which eighty-two soldiers were slaughtered, led to the abandoning of the forts. Even so, the freighter might have continued to try to force the road

had not the Union Pacific neared Corinne, disgorging freight and immigrant at rail's end, an easy few hundred miles from the mines. Everyone coming west, everyone freighting west used the speedy Iron Horse, giving the disputed land back to the Indians by neglect.

When the road came into disuse, old Jim Bridger still had his hair, although he'd brought trains up the bloody Bozeman trail, but John Bozeman had got himself ambushed and scalped in revenge for his road.

Almost any old roadway that followed along not far from the route did for emigrant and freighter alike, each new wave of travel making wagon tracks parallel to older roads as the way became difficult. This was all very well on cross-country routes, but Virginia City merchants wanted something less haphazard after the roads crossed Territorial borders. They boosted for graded roads running straight to the capital. If Virginia City was to grow into its brilliant future so often prophesied by the *Post,* good roads had to be constructed. If she was to keep her preëminence as trading center to the Territory, good feeder roads must fan out to all the settlements. If she was to retain her position as first city of the Territory, there had to be available to the pilgrim good emigrant roads which would lead him straight to her doorstep.

Unfortunately, the Territory had no way of financing such roads, no matter how necessary. None of the land of the infant Territory had been surveyed, hence it could not be taxed. Appeals for funds to the United States Congress were overlooked by that harassed body, busy with its own war worries. No public money could be raised for road building; yet, roads must be had.

Men who could foresee the coming of hordes of immigrants proposed that the roads be built privately and supported by tolls. They knew that the squatters at makeshift bridges and ferries along the Oregon Trail had done well. They figured

that the new toll road between Virginia City and Summit, built the summer of '64 by Allen and Millard, the "bankers," was doing well. A little flyer in road-owning might be a good thing—especially if there were no competition. Tolls, they argued in Virginia City, could build and maintain fine roads and bridges throughout the Territory. Tolls from a main-traveled road, they thought in private, would pay better than a gold claim. So they wangled monopolistic charters out of the first Territorial Legislature, each of these franchises granting to an individual or company the sole rights to a certain route and allowing them to charge all comers for the privilege of using the roads and bridges provided. Thirty-four different transportation charters were granted, covering every possible transportation route, every river crossing in the Territory, some of the charters giving the holders right to pre-empt townsites along the way, as well as sole rights to the telegraph route which might follow their road. Most important, the companies were given right of way for ten miles on each side of the route in order to keep any competing road from using the same route. Most of the charters also stated that the roads must be built within a specified time and kept in good traveling condition: ". . . any person who may travel said road and find it in bad condition, shall have the right to make complaint before any justice of the peace." If his complaint was found to be justified, "no toll shall be collected upon said road, or any part thereof, until it is put in good repair." [11]

Tolls to be charged were specified for each road and bridge, but they varied so widely in amount there seems to have been little rhyme or reason in the way they were established. John Baptist Lorrain (Laurin) and Toussaint Kensler, proprietors of the Big Hole Bridge Company, had about as good a thing as bridge proprietors could get. At the toll gate for their bridge over the Big Hole River they demanded duty according to these specifications:

> . . . there may be collected for said bridge the following tolls, and no more, to wit: For each wagon or vehicle drawn by one span of horses, mules or cattle, five dollars; for each vehicle drawn by one horse, mule or other animal, two dollars; for each additional span of horses, mules, or other animals, one dollar; for each riding horse or mule, one dollar; for horses, mules, cattle, and asses driven loose, the sum per head of fifty cents; for hogs and sheep, the sum per head of twenty-five cents . . .[12]

It was claimed by Colonel McClure, in one of his articles for the New York *Tribune,* that this bridge brought in $8000 annually to Lorrain,[13] a neat yearly income from his share of the $6000 necessary to construct such a bridge.

Road builders could be sure of equally good returns on investment. Consider the Bozeman City and Fort Laramie Road Company, which held the rights to the Montana end of the famed Bozeman Trail. Here Walter Dance and R. Anderson, incorporators, could legally extort two dollars for each span of mules, horses, and oxen, plus another dollar for each additional span. They could collect this amount at each toll gate along their road, and there was such a gate every forty miles!

The first Assembly, in its generosity, went so far as to extend a franchise which covered the route of the public Mullan Road, built by the Army, and in use three years. The franchise holders immediately put up obstructions across the military road, forcing any traveler to use the private road. Farmers in the Bitterroot Valley denounced the legislature for closing the road by which they freighted their produce to the mining camps, complaining they had been separated from the Territory by this action. Acting Governor Meagher, upon his arrival upon the Montana scene in 1865, branded this toll road a fraud. Still, nothing official was done to revoke the charter—but in 1866 emigrants from the west pushed their

way through the Mullan Road, removing obstacles as they went. Once again the road was open, but it was in such bad condition that a later Montana Assembly had the gall to ask Congress to appropriate money to repair it. (A similar situation arose after Madison County built a public bridge over the Jefferson River, and in the summer of 1865 had to station men there to keep it open after someone had fenced it off and piled stones on the roadway.)[14]

The whole greedy proceedings were treated as a speculative lark, even statesmen of the caliber of W. F. Sanders condoning the charters, writing jocularly of the franchise granted the Bozeman City and Milk River Wagon Road Company, "Some mean individual reading this charter might note that nothing is said as to constructing a road"[15]—and nothing was, although authority to charge toll was granted. Neither was anything said about maintaining a road. But for that matter, few of the roads were kept up, whether or not it was so agreed in the charter. The toll road from Virginia City to Summit was so rough that the *Post* complained that travelers on it should be labeled "to be well-shaken." Governor Ashley, third governor of the Territory, speaking to the Assembly of 1869, declared that no more than one day's work per year per mile had ever been put in on these roads. For this, a man with a wagon and team paid $40 toll between Virginia City and Corinne, Utah.[16]

The scrubby little log cabin on Bannack's main street, which housed the first legislature, was kept in a state of siege all through the first session by men in great coats, stamping in the snow against the sub-zero cold of their outdoor lobby, men with franchises in mind. Much of the time of this maiden assembly was devoted to deciding who was to get what franchise without neglecting any constituent with political power. Like so many Montana legislatures since, its members were

there not so much to govern as to oversee the slicing of the public pie.

They gave out very generous portions, indeed, except to the two men who, finding all other possible routes spoken for, attempted to steal a slice for themselves by claiming proprietorship of the Salt Lake Road—a property they had acquired by riding over it. Their claim was equal to that of those who acquired the Mullan Road route, but the legislative gentlemen couldn't see it their way (obviously, they had scratched no political backs). Certainly their bid wasn't refused on political grounds, though most of the legislators were Southerners, for Northerners and Southerners forgot their differences when there was public pie to slice: one marked out the pieces while the other cut along the line.

If the b'hoys were cheated by their representatives, they couldn't say nobody warned them. The *Montana Post*'s legislative observer, writing from Bannack, reported the road deals in letters to the editor from "Franklin," who, writing in January, said, "Men do not realize how seriously these charters will cripple the best interests and developments of our Territory;" and again in March, "Travelers in Montana will curse this assembly so long as its monuments [toll-gates] remain . . ."; and, later in the same month, chided the lawmakers for granting so many charters, facetiously saying he understood they were patriotically going to hold an extra session "for the purpose of granting a charter for the only remaining free road in the Territory," an "unaccountable oversight" that well might be corrected.[17]

Another writer to the *Post* from the first legislative scene warned the b'hoys: "Everything is ground through on the 'get what you can' principle. . . . If all the roads, bridges, ferries and the like, for which charters have been obtained, are built and finished, at the limitation of time granted them,

parties leaving next year will suffer a severe lightening of pocket." [18]

The b'hoys paid no heed: the doings of a foreign legislature are of little moment to visitors in the country. The first bill to be signed by Governor Edgerton was the road law approving the Missouri River and Rocky Mountain Wagon Road and Telegraph Company.[19]

The injustice of the charters was still being wryly commented upon thirty years later. A. J. Bennett, in a speech to the Society of Montana Pioneers (an organization at first limited to those emigrants who had arrived in the Territory before 1864) said, ". . . the pioneers did not endure all the hardships incidental to coming to Montana in the early days—they at least did not have to pay the tolls." [20] Nor, it might be added, were any of them drowned as was at least one later, penniless traveler when he tried to ford the river because the ferryman refused to take him.

The United States Congress also objected to the high-handed way in which the Territorial Assembly had allowed such free-booting exploitation of the country by legislating competition out of existence. In 1867 it condemned all of the charters allowed by the Assembly and passed an act forbidding any other Territory to grant such franchises. Montana's Assembly dutifully revoked all charters the next year, but by then the damage had been done.

Old-timers estimated that the man who operated the toll gate at the mouth of Ruby Canyon, on the main freight road to Utah, about fourteen miles from Virginia City, cleared $50,000 in three years.[21]

CHAPTER TEN

POLITICKING: DIXIE AND YANKEE DOODLE

THE STORY IS that the first person to call for a separate Montana Territory was a drunken miner haranguing the b'hoys from a wagon standing on a street in Bannack. Probably 'twas so, for after the Congress had granted his wish, given him his Territory, the early affairs of the place were on such a drink-to-drink basis one miner summed up the voting in the first Territorial elections by saying "Election day came, the polls were open and forty-rod carried the day." [1] The batwing doors of the saloons went on flapping all of the next several election days as bummers swigged another free drink and staggered off to vote again—and again—as often as they could navigate from bar to polling place. The *Post* observed these floaters, wept over them time and time again as its man Sanders was defeated for delegate to Congress, but child of the times as it was, it didn't get around to calling for a law against selling liquor on election day until 1867.

A year earlier it had thought that perhaps restrictions should be put upon who could vote—and how often. It had

complained that everyone who happened to be in town on election day went to the polls, freighters, tourists, and non-naturalized foreigners (but no Indians, Chinese or Negroes, who were specifically disenfranchised by statute). But in 1867 the situation still existed, and Colonel McClure reported to his New York paper:

> They vote in a very free and easy manner in the mountains. A resident can vote at any poll in the Territory, no matter where he may have his home, and they do not often take the trouble to swear voters. It is needless to say that many "vote early, vote often, and see that their neighbors vote," besides occasionally voting for them, in Montana elections. Cavanaugh had more majority in several precincts than there were men, women, and children within the limits of the polls. They cheated just for the love of it; for a fair election would have given the Democracy as much majority as they needed for every purpose.[2]

It was, perhaps, this matter of a clear-cut majority for the Democrats which made the elections such a devil-may-care lot of monkey business: since no one's votes could keep the Southerners out of office, they were worth free drinks and no more.

The first election was an especial anathema to Republican believers. Nobody had counted heads, but the Democrats ganged around the polling places, whooping in celebration of their foregone victory, shouting, "Hurrah, boys another Secesh vote!" as a bummer stumbled into line, or bidding passersby, "Walk along, gentlemen, vote for Dixie's land! Here are your papers! Straight Democratic ticket! No damned Union about it." [3] Their rebel yells cheered the name of Sterling Price and his army up and down Wallace Street; their caterwauling jeered the playing of *Yankee Doodle* by Waugh's band. They yelled, "That tune's played out," called for *Dixie* instead, and fought clean to bedrock with anyone who had no ear for their kind

of music. Sure enough, at the end of the day, when the formality of vote counting was over, their candidates had carried the day, including one legislator who could neither read nor write.

It had been a dilly of an election for the Johnny Rebs. Through it they had been able to show Mr. Union, Thomas Dimsdale, they didn't give a hoot in hell for his editorials—"Shall we be faithful to the Union, or fall prostrate at the feet of that arch traitor, Jeff Davis?" he had pleaded just two weeks before the election. They had cut off their noses by winning the election, for, as Dimsdale had pointed out, sending a Confederate sympathizer to Washington as Territorial Delegate was the same as having no representative there. But the good of the Territory came second to whoppin' Yankees; the political battles here were as emotional as the shooting battles of the East, but ballots were more easily controlled than bullets, and in Montana the South won the war. In the words of N. P. Langford, internal revenue collector, "I was in a Territory more disloyal as a whole, than Tennessee or Kentucky ever were. Four-fifths of our citizens were *openly declared* Secessionists. . . . Then we had Jeff Davis Gulch, and Confederate Gulch. . . . In our local matters, we were completely under the rebel rule. . . . I had not the support of one fourth of our people, and threats of violence were the rule, and not the exception." [4]

One of Sidney Edgerton's first acts as Governor was to appoint Bannack as the meeting place for the first Territorial Assembly. He next conducted a hasty census to give him some idea of the apportionment of the seven Council (upper house) members and the thirteen House members called for in the Organic Act passed by the Congress. The census showed 15,822 residents in the Territory, 11,493 of these living in Madison County, which contained Alder Gulch, the remaining 3000-plus scattered in Beaverhead, Jefferson, Chouteau, Deer

Lodge and Missoula Counties, the only organized counties in the Territory (although Chouteau was not completely organized).[5]

Edgerton was forced to ignore his census, which would have given most of the legislative seats to Madison County. Instead he allotted council members to the counties: Madison, three members; Beaverhead, two; Jefferson, one; and to the combined counties of Missoula, Deer Lodge and Chouteau, one. House members were similarly allocated.

The three Madison County men went to Bannack to hook the capital for Virginia City (Bannack was not a capital city; that choice was left to the people, Edgerton's designation of it as meeting place for the first legislature not having made it the capital). It was a big fish they were after, one that would feed their whole town for years to come on government payroll, increased travel, state buildings, and assorted other political plums. They had more hooks than rival fishermen from Deer Lodge and Bannack, and a more plentiful supply of gold dust for bait, supplied by Virginia City speculators who had followed along to Bannack to aid in landing the capital. They were using the right lure for the pool in which they dropped their line, for within it, according to the *Post*'s "Franklin," were "some of the most venal, corrupt and shameless legislators in the world . . . men openly in the streets propose to sell votes for a given price. . . ." [6]

The Republican *Post* was splenetic about the Democratic doings in Bannack, but in view of the fact that the legislators there tried to insure that ensuing ones would be in favor of Madison County by realigning apportionments, and voted themselves twelve dollars a day out of Territorial funds[7] (above the four dollars a day they were legally entitled to from United States coffers), it seems likely that the *Post* was not too hard on its enemies. At any rate, Virginia City, richest of the aspirants for the capital designation, won out.

The vested interest of the *Post* in the future of Virginia City kept it mum about the cost of this Pyrrhic victory, but it had been so outspoken over other trickery, the legislators were furious with it. They drew up a resolution chastising "Franklin" and the paper. When the attacks continued the council refused to pay the thirty-five-dollar bill owing the *Post* for the seven copies of the paper delivered each week to its chambers. Maybe the council members thought it hadn't been delivered; if so, they were wrong: members of the lower house had been swiping it each week before they could lay their hands on it.[8]

For more than ten years Virginia City was destined to have as much political as mining talk on its streets, to have more than its share of the drunkenness, double-dealing, innuendo and enmities that came with being the capital city.

The winters of '64, '66, and '67 stirred up the town through the meetings of the Democrat-dominated second, third, and fourth territorial legislatures. The first had succeeded in drawing up a code of laws which later ones could not leave unamended (if one is a lawmaker, he must make laws). The second and third assemblies, called by Acting Governor Meagher, were declared illegal by the United States Congress, and all of their acts were voided—after Republican Colonel Sanders had traveled to Washington, D. C., to let the Unionists know what the Confederates were up to in Montana. The fourth assembly in 1867, legal enough, spent most of its time sanctifying and re-passing the voided acts of the outlawed second and third assemblies, "while trying to appear as if they were not," according to Colonel McClure, who also noted that, "Taken as a body, the legislature falls below mediocrity. . . . Here as elsewhere, however, politics is a trade, and is not cultivated for the lesser honors by the best men."[9] He was a visiting Republican and a friend of biennial Congressional candidate Sanders, and biased.

The movement of the government from Bannack to the capital consisted mainly of renting rooms about Virginia City to house the offices, for the Territory had acquired no trappings as yet. (Edgerton's office had been a curtained corner in his cabin.) The story is told that when just-arrived Secretary Meagher took over as Acting Governor for Edgerton, who was returning east, he carried all the official Territorial papers from Bannack to Virginia City in his coat pocket. The $500 which the first Assembly had appropriated for planning and finding sites for buildings of state in Virginia City lay unused, because the few offices and files could be housed easily in available space.

The Treasurer of the Territory could be found in his office in the Idaho Hotel, while the Acting Governor was near by, diagonally across the intersection in rooms above Content's store.

Court was held at first in the dining room of the Planter's Hotel. It thoughtfully convened just after breakfast, but sometimes caused some tightening of boarders' belts at the dinner hour by not adjourning until late. Here Judge Hosmer ran a lenient court, his bench a carpet-covered sofa upon which he could recline during long-winded arguments "without encroaching the dignity of his great office." And the arguments were long-winded, for the b'hoys felt that unless their lawyers talked at length they weren't getting their money's worth. Hosmer let the proceedings ramble on, rarely interfering, allowing complete informality to the rest of the court as well, at one time sending the sheriff out to find a good pine board when the jurors complained they couldn't think without whittling. Hosmer was accused of being ineffectual on the bench, but it appears he just knew his b'hoys. Once he did let things get so hot that the opposing lawyers spent all of the next day looking for each other, guns in hand, ready to shoot it out. At least, that was what they said they were doing, but neither

of them ever pressed their search far enough along the streets of the little town actually to find the other one.

With the coming of the government to the city, there were jobs available for clerks and minor officials, but there was no money in the treasury to pay them. Edgerton had been paying many of the expenses of the Territory out of his own pocket.

When the Assembly met, however, there were better jobs to be had, sergeants-at-arms to be hired, and clerks, and all the other overburden of lawmaking—and the salaries would be met, for the federal government footed this bill. Legislators were buttonholed from the time they clambered out of the stagecoach until the gavel fell opening the sessions by men seeking attache jobs, as well as by their old enemy, publisher Tilton, seeking printing contracts for his paper.

Those with buildings to rent pulled whatever strings they could in order to lease them for legislative halls. A good-sized dining room would have held either the seven-man Council or the thirteen-man House, but in honor of the gentlemen and their legislative function, the Territory always hired a hall for each group. "Meagher's Legislatures" met in buildings immediately across Wallace Street from each other, the Council in the Idaho Hotel and the House in the hall in the second story of the Stonewall Building, where the Gem Literary Society had died a' borning.

The 1867 House members found themselves in Con Orem's Melodeon Saloon, up Jackson Street a few doors from his old stand, the Champion Saloon, while the Council sat around the stove in the big room above John Rockfellow's store, down the street a way. These halls were dressed in the modest best the Territory could afford.

Con's place was carpeted with an inexpensive rug that covered the half of the floor where the thirteen members sat, looking at one of Con's poker rooms, now converted into a Speaker's stand. Above the Speaker's table hung a rudely

carved wooden eagle and a sign proclaiming this to be the House of Representatives, no doubt for the information of former customers who might stagger in and demand a brandy smash. While the House was adjourned for New Year's Day, Con rolled up the rug, spread sawdust on the floor, and staged an illegal prize fight on the premises. Vacationing legislators had to pay one dollar a head to come back in to their chambers to see the contest.

Sixty days of legislating was more than enough to engross all of the bills of these legislatures, with plenty of time left over for horseplay, the members sitting about the comfortable, warm stove, whittling and cracking jokes, dreaming up Peanut Bills, Poker Club Bills, and Jawbone Bills, as well as a bill for the relief of one Chas. Trowbridge, "member of the Union League, for going to Fort Union for votes last year." The Sergeant-at-Arms was prone to fall asleep during sessions; as he slept, the assembled gentlemen tied his feet together and then yelled "Call of the House" in his ear. They had even more fun guying the lone Republican elected to the fourth session in 1867, bedeviling him about his uselessness here until he quit showing up for meetings. This legislature was named "The Missouri Admiration Society" by some Republican wag.

On a genuine call of the House, the Sergeant always headed in one direction—toward the near-by Pony Saloon. It was here that the Third House met, and here the honorable members regularly fled when an embarrassing roll call was coming up.

Informality was inevitable when a quorum of the council consisted of only four members, hardly a decent committee meeting today, and when there was little to do except dream up ways to inveigle Congress to raise their pay from four dollars a day, a pittance in a mining-camp economy. They were bored, for much of the work of the second, third, and fourth

legislatures consisted of memorializing Congress for more funds for public buildings, for better mail facilities, for a good road into the Territory, for better Indian protection, etc.

The ridiculousness of lawmakers whose promulgations could be swept aside by Congress tickled the b'hoys in Nevada City. They called a meeting of a mock legislature whose chief proclamation was an edict directing the Surveyor General to regulate the lines of latitude and longitude "so that the mountains shall not be higher than the [legislative] members assembled." A Virginia City mock session also got in some licks, motions being declared defeated after receiving ten times more ayes than noes, and motions to print 1,700,000 copies of the proceedings being unaccountably lost.

Campaigns made a lot of excitement about town, much of it alcoholic, for every bummer was sure of a daily drink per candidate along about election time. Political rallies were held outside, speakers standing on the square wooden hydrant across from Content's Corner or up by the flagpole near the Planter's House, their makeshift podium lit by flaring, kerosene-soaked fluff-balls speared by wire and jabbed into any near-by wooden structure. The speaker had to be part bull-roarer to outshout music from neighboring saloons, the chatter of gamblers who had set up portable gambling tables on the fringes of the crowd, as well as the hooting and jibes from the opposition. Whatever a speaker's politics, whatever his argument, his first necessity was volume, for any rally was sure to draw a crowd of over five hundred, the diversion alone drawing the b'hoys to the place.

Torchlight parades usually preceded the speaking, horsemen carrying torches, a double line of marchers shouldering transparencies. The "brass-throated freedom shrieker" was fired, the boom of it echoing up, up, up into the gulch and all about town. Candles burned in windows along Wallace Street, adding their pale flicker to the illumination, fitfully holding

back the customary night-blackness of the boardwalks, while the flaring torches transformed bleak, familiar storefronts into soft and shadowy charcoal sketches of themselves, magically changing marching neighbors into pageantry figures.

Politics was entertainment in isolated Virginia City. Knowing this, newspapers paid little attention to the laws of libel, smearing opposing candidates in terms even the bummer could understand. An opposition editor once called Colonel Sanders "an inordinate blackguard," and declared, "On every occasion the Colonel erects himself on his slim pins and emits quaint remarks of a smutty nature."[10] Another editor attacked a candidate by saying, "The charlatan and mountebank, Ben. Ezekiel, writhing under the charges of fraud and guilt proven against him by this paper, snaps and snarls like a belabored cur . . . prevents our taking further notice of the moral leper than to condescend to spit in his face should he cross our path."[11] Political argument reduced to the common denominator of saloon bickering was the stuff of mountain politics.

This squabbling was fun, but the b'hoys in Virginia City had one political problem that united Democrat and Republican: keeping the town the capital city of Montana Territory, defeating the biennial legislative bill which attempted to wrest it from them. It had been nip-and-tuck to garner the honor in the first Assembly, but now Helena was getting too big for its britches and demanding that it be made the capital. Deer Lodge also had delusions of political grandeur, but Helena was the enemy.

The battle was carried on at long range, the only shots fired being editorial missiles. Virginia City and Helena editors once broke into nursery-rhyme parody in their battle of words:

Our Hugh McQuaid
Has been waylaid
And we know not where to find him;
But let him alone,
And he'll come home
With the Capital close behind him.

—(Helena) *Independent*

This same McQuaid
That you have said
Would bring the Capital with him,
Is still in town,
Scooting aroun',
Being unable to tote the Capital on
his back—and expects to leave it
at a way-station, or at its present
location.

—(Virginia City) *Madisonian*[12]

The legislature of 1868 allowed the capital-city issue to come to a vote before the people in the elections of 1869, much to the disgust of Madison County b'hoys, who could see no reason for their delegates' allowing such democratic action when they could still control the Assembly by their plurality. Faced with such a dangerous election, the b'hoys made every preparation to control it, keeping a wary eye on Last Chancers, for they expected "That the campaign would be dishonest, that the ballot would be stuffed. . . ."

On voting day, when the news came over the telegraph that Helenans were turning in more votes than their population warranted, local voters multiplied prodigiously. Four men mining at the head of Wigwam Creek turned in 250 votes for their "town." Summit, which could have cast perhaps 150 votes legally, turned up with an even 600, while friendly Junc-

tion, which could have dug up fifty voters, had no trouble in returning 200 votes for Virginia as capital city.[13] Such neighborliness saved the capital for Virginia City by a substantial margin, for a "lucky" fire destroyed all records in the Territorial Secretary's office before the votes could be canvassed.

The election of 1874 likewise produced voting and ballot-counting shenanigans on the part of both towns. Gallatin County, adjacent to Madison, voted 551 to 96 to keep the capital in Virginia City, but the officials threw out her votes because the returns didn't conform to law. Virginia City b'hoys quit speaking to the canvassers. Conversely, Meagher County, near Helena, tallied election-day votes of 561 for Helena and only twenty-nine for her rival, but, when the canvassing board slit the sealed envelopes in Virginia City, the figures that fell on the table were tabulated exactly in reverse. To make matters worse, they had been delayed somehow and had conveniently arrived in town on the thirtieth and last legal day for counting votes.[14] Helenans screamed "Foul!" and hired lawyers to prove that skulduggery had been done. The case finally went to the Supreme Court, which adjudged that Helena had won, and Governor Potts so proclaimed it.

Virginia City b'hoys took their defeat grudgingly. A newspaper soundly expressed their feelings for them:

> . . . the last remains and remnants of the moving Capital of Montana Territory passed down Wallace Street on a couple of Murphy freight wagons. It was an indifferent lot of old second-hand chairs, tables and three-legged stools, and might, if exposed at public auction, find a purchaser in some poor devil about to commit premature matrimony. Not another soul in the wide world would dream of buying it.[15]

Although she was no longer capital, Virginia's streets were still filled with political wrangling over local elections, for she was county seat of Madison County as well as being the only

incorporated town in the Territory. Most of the in-fighting was due to city politics.

The incorporation charter was the bone of contention in '65 and '66. It had been granted to the tent and wikiup camp by the Legislature of Idaho Territory on January 30, 1864, and by a similar act of the Montana Assembly on December 30, 1864, but by the time the election of February 5, 1865, came along, most of the businessmen, smelling taxes in the charter, were against it. Feeling was so high that, though the bars closed at noon, a storekeeper's diary shows that "A General free fight took place at the Election today." [16]

A month later, the first city council, Mayor Pfouts presiding, issued a budget and a schedule of license fees by which the budget would be supported, and the "general free fight" resumed. Every businessman in town, from the hole-in-the-wall dealer who paid ten dollars every six months to the gambler who was clipped for $150 per half year, damned the council and its gouging ways. "Why should we have city government?" they cried; "Quit the charter before our town is depopulated on account of taxation." [17]

The council had estimated that the license fees would raise the $15,000 necessary to run the city and pointed out that this total was about half the budget usually asked for a town this size. Only $8600 was to be paid out in salaries: $1550 apiece for two policemen and $2000 for a city clerk were the biggest items.[18] Office holders who were not paid salaries were compensated by a percentage of the fees they collected; John Rockfellow, City Treasurer, for example, was entitled to three per cent of any city money he collected.

But the men trying to dump the charter weren't interested in the economy of the city government; they could see little sense in paying a street commissioner to fix streets which would very likely revert to sagebrush when the gold was gone. They complained that the only advantage of incorporation to

them for $15,000 spent would be two policemen. Further, they pouted over the unfairness of licenses that soaked the merchant but let his landlord off untaxed. They wanted no blasted tax gatherer nicking their pocketbooks.

The council dreamed of plats and subdivisions (and perhaps streets named after first aldermen) and clung to their beloved charter. They made some concessions, however. They halved the license fees after someone's superior arithmetic proved that those they had set up would raise $35,000 rather than $15,000; they took the street commissioner off the payroll and gave his job to the city marshal; they put a tax on landlords of one dollar per each $100 rent per annum. Instead of reducing taxes further, they spent money saved by putting two more policemen to work.[19] (The councilmen were dedicated city planners. A later council would have a beautifully scrolled map drawn up showing streets on which there was nary a house, parks which were enjoyed by gophers. City fathers also dabbled in promotion schemes to attract residents to their Rocky Mountain metropolis.)

The furor was still going on at the second city election a year later. This time, anti-charter people were voted into office. The departing city council refused to seat Mayor Castner's incoming government until after the votes were recanvassed. Meanwhile, the anti-charterists petitioned the second legislature, then in session, to repeal the city's charter in a document signed by almost everyone in town—Tilton, the publisher whose paper had plumped for city government being one, with George Gohn, N. P. Langford, Samuel Hauser, Lucien Romey, and W. S. Gilbert, brewer, among the others. The opposition petition, a weak thing, supported by a few straggling signatures, reached the legislature about the same time. They were both referred to committee where they died.[20] The anti-charter council was stuck for a year running a city government they didn't believe in, but they did manage to keep

expenses down, spending only $9,884.74 for the fiscal year, including $123.99 for fuel and lights for the calaboose[21]—in spite of which the jail was reported clean and comfy and the prisoners "enjoying themselves as well as possible."

The city was always short of funds, for taxes were hard to collect in Montana. The Territorial Tax Collector had managed to collect only thirty per cent of taxes owed during the first two years of the Territory, having run into one county, Chouteau, which refused to organize so that it would not be financially responsible, and into two counties that simply made no returns.[22] Similarly, all other towns in the Territory would resist their incorporation charters so successfully that Virginia City would be the only incorporated town in Montana when the Territory became a State in 1889—and for several years afterward.

The incorporation was an expensive luxury for the little mining camp, a luxury which never did take care of the civic needs listed in the *Post* in November, 1864, before the town was organized. Among these were street improvements, fire protection, traffic control, regulations concerning closing hours, and the necessity of having horses stand with their heads to the sidewalk. In the ensuing ten years, the city council's one unquestioned accomplishment was to persuade the horses to turn around.

The city government made no attempt to guard against the great danger of fire, except to pass ordinances outlawing the use of tin stovepipes in town—but fires were still starting from them and editors were still complaining of them in the seventies. It furnished no equipment: six months after the first council was seated the paper was begging for a triangle to sound the alarm, for at the last fire only one-tenth of the firemen knew about it, and pleading for funds to buy a hand-powered pump to replace the wooden shovels then used for throwing water. In the next year the city did build cisterns,

which the paper admitted were well-contrived—save for holding water.

Luckily, none of the smaller fires (such as the one caused by a flaring wing light at the theater or the one which dropped X. Beidler into the midst of a burning cabin when the roof collapsed—from which he scampered with minor burns) ever got out of control. Some arson attempts were discovered just in the nick of time, the most serious one involving a plan to shut off the city water at the same moment torches would have been applied to the tinder-dry town.[23] Some said this was a plot by the road agents in revenge for Vigilante action, but it seems more likely that its origin was like that of the one in which an Idaho mountain town had been fired by vandals who used the cover of smoke, fire, and excitement to burglarize vacant stores. Whatever the purpose, the town would surely have gone up in smoke had not a chance visitor to the reservoirs above town found that they had been stopped up.

The city council seldom accomplished anything for the b'hoys: street cleaning was nil, garbage remained wherever it had been dumped, streets remained unlit. The council ordered hogs kept off the streets again and again, yet the nuisance was not abated. In 1871 they were still waging war against the porkers, but found themselves so strapped for money that they couldn't afford to have the anti-hog edicts published, causing an editor to comment:

> . . . so they have ordered the clerk to get a bell and spend three days going over town and in a loud voice promulgate their edicts, ordinances and commands. If he can halloo loud enough to scare the hogs off, we think the said meeting will not have been in vain.[24]

The editor barked because those obnoxious taxes were still biting his pocketbook. Like all the other empire builders in town, he had hoped the West would relieve the pain of

tax-bites, and, when the cur of government followed him even here, he groaned at its every nip of assessment as though it were rabies-infected. Merchants tried to avoid being contaminated by the income-tax dog by claiming profits of less than $1000 or by the liquor-tax dog by claiming (after their liquor was seized) that the stamps had not been available.[25] When these quick steps failed to dodge the hated teeth, they learned to smile grimly at the *Post*'s quip: "A friend of ours is under bond to stand treat whenever he remains unvisited by a tax collector for a week," while feeling in their heart as miner Morley did when he kicked at the tax dog in his diary on a July Saturday in 1864:

> . . . To-day a collector made his appearance in the gulch to "stick" us for a four dollar poll tax, as he said, to raise $5000.00 to build a jail. That seems to be of primary importance in organizing government these latter days. I more than half wish, when I see such officers and the scores of "pettifoggers" going about seeking "whom they may devour" in the country, that Uncle Samuel would let us severely alone, for it is a fact that miners can make their own laws so as to get along smoothly with each other, better than government laws enforced by such men.[26]

Only a year before he had been belaboring miners' meetings. What he and the rest of Alder Gulch wanted was to get home with their wealth before the local tax hounds could come sniffing around. They were successful. Not much of Alder's gold stayed home to build either the town or the Territory.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE EDITOR, THE COLONEL AND THE WILD IRISHMAN

THOMAS DIMSDALE, the erstwhile village schoolmaster, grew to be a leader of the town and a Republican bigwig, though he was hardly the rugged, rough-and-tumble leader of men that a novelist would cast in such a role. A slight, mild-mannered wisp of a man, he spoke with an accent acquired at Oxford (he had been forced to come to the United States after his family lost money in a scheme to convert London sewage to fertilizer), which gave rise to the legend that he was a prissy, shy pedagogue who blushed easily. This caricature doesn't jibe with the character of the man whom the miners unhesitatingly chose, along with J. E. McClurg, to account for the flour they seized in the "flour riots" of '65; the angry man who waged a campaign against the medical quacks in town who were maiming patients because they had no more medical foundation than "ignorance, brass and a doctor's shingle"; the unsqeamish man who was tough enough to assist at emergency amputations; the courageous man who chose to stand up and be counted as a friend of the Vigilantes and as a staunch Unionist when it was risky to do so. True, he was frail and tubercular, unfit for mining, but

the inner man was tough enough to make up for the lack in outer muscles.

Schoolteaching was hardly an absorbing interest with him; he was much too interested in the tumultuous life and staggering growth of the town outside his log school building. He arrived in town about the time of the Vigilantes, but he may not have been one, although it was through them and their deeds that he found an outlet which made use of his education: the writing of his famous *The Vigilantes of Montana,* a book still selling several thousand copies each year. Much of this volume he wrote during school hours; his pupils remembered him as an abstracted, kindly man who sat near the window writing, writing, writing, every spare moment.

The Vigilantes needed an able apologist, for criticism of their actions was growing outside of the Territory. Dimsdale's book explained to these detractors their version of how things had been in Montana. When he finished it, the kingpins of the town (synonymous with kingpins in the Vigilantes) presented him with a silver-plated revolver in appreciation. More than this, the manuscript established him as the able voice of the Territory and opened the job as editor of the *Montana Post* to him. It was originally printed in serial form in its pages.

As editor, Dimsdale proved to be such a staunch ally of the Union cause that he was soon asked to speak for the Republican Party at a good many rallies. At these meetings, Dimsdale was always the last speaker—evidently because his sardonic humor kept the crowd chuckling and sent it home in a good humor. He was especially sarcastic lambasting the Secessionists, one time querying, to the delight of most of his listeners, "when the gov't. was consigned to Hell, as it had been so often by the speakers during the preceding meeting, to what part of the United States did the Democrats intend to send their delegate?" [1]

His wit made his paper loved by the fun-loving b'hoys, no

matter what their politics, for it fitted right in with the tongue-in-cheek attitude of the whole Territory. Once he convulsed them when, refusing to retract remarks he had written about the Mormons, he said that making love to several women was too much, and that, as far as he was concerned, the best part of a Mormon house would be a "well-oiled back door."

At other times, combining his guts with his humor, he tried to reform the wild ones about town, warning "young men, and, we are sorry to add, old ones . . . (that) . . . those who discharge small arms in or near the city" will be punished in a way "more effectual than agreeable," commenting: "Those who are so fond of blazing away, seldom do much when the target has also a revolver pointed in their direction. They go in for peace at once. They wouldn't fire at a human being for any consideration. When a MAN draws a revolver something is going to fall." [2]

But essentially he put together a weekly *news*paper, filled with serviceable items for the b'hoys: the week's local wholesale market prices for staples, gold prices, mining news (here he was on the horns of a dilemma, if he made new strikes sound too good the town would be depopulated; on the other hand, if not good enough, the news wouldn't interest eastern emigrants and investors); stagecoach passenger lists as well as schedules, lists of mail uncalled for at the post office, and complete printings of important new laws of the Territory. When there was a show troupe in town, he reviewed every performance of their repertoire and urged everyone to buy seats, for to him a town without a theater didn't rate the sobriquet of City. But he was equally generous of his time and space in backing prizefighting, especially those battles of his close friend, Con Orem. For that matter, he boosted anything that might add a little more civilization to his mining camp. It occasionally led him into ridiculous enthusiasms, such as this one: "Two

institutions of a recreative kind are wanted in Montana. The first is a Jockey Club—the second is a Cricket Club. Who will volunteer to start them? There is a splendid ground for fall races." [3]

He ran a good newspaper, the first in Montana Territory and the best. For several years it outsold the combined circulation of its rivals, including the *Montana Democrat* in Virginia City and Helena's *Herald* and *Rocky Mountain Gazette,* at a price of fifty cents a copy or eight dollars a year in gold, and attracted advertisers who were willing to buy half columns by the year at ninety dollars per annum.[4]

As editor, Dimsdale automatically became publicist for the Union Party in Montana, but some of his strongest editorials were written pleading for public education of the children in the Territory. Thus his services to the party were rewarded with the appropriate appointment of Superintendent of Schools, an office more honorary than not, for it paid no salary, the office not having been provided for by the first Territorial Assembly (it had been established by direct proclamation of Governor Edgerton). This "oversight" on the Assembly's part no doubt repaid Dimsdale for his paper's rough handling of their sixty days in Bannack.

After Edgerton left, Dimsdale was second in party importance only to Colonel Sanders, who also grew to be his best friend. The two men may have been atracted to each other through the medium of their equally sharp tongues, for Sanders, too, was known as a master of invective. In the courtroom he had at times tongue-lashed men to the point where they would have killed him as he stepped out of the courtroom that day, had he not walked straight up to them and charmed them into being friends. Opposing lawyers twice challenged him to duels for remarks made in court, but the contest failed to come off both times. Dimsdale and he had much

in common in their notions as to how the Territory should develop, what values should be stressed, and what institutions encouraged.

Soon the frail little Englishman had parlayed his abilities and his contributions to the new society into a very promising political career. He hired a Mr. Davis to teach in his school and devoted his full time to the party and to the paper. As a good politician should, he married and became a part of all community enterprises. On Sundays he read the services for the Episcopalian congregation he had organized. He attended meetings of the Literary and Debating Society, of which he was an officer, and which had as members all the important men in town. Other nights he spoke at rallies or wrote editorials, when he was not out carousing with the Nightherd.

Unfortunately, by 1866, he had worn himself out trying to make the most of his opportunity. He had to give up the newspaper and move to the country to recuperate. In September he died, coughing out the last minutes of his life clasped in the arms of his friend, Sanders.

The raspy Colonel now led the Republican Party alone. He continued his battle for the Union, which he had started with his enlistment in the Army in 1861. There he had risen to be Acting Assistant Adjutant General on the staff of General Forsyth, before ill health had forced him to resign. When he came west with his uncle, Governor Edgerton, to find himself in Confederate-dominated Territory, he had continued his battling. He was to fight the Republican battle for the rest of his life, undismayed by criticism and threats and continued defeat by the unsympathetic majority. In the 1890's, speaking at a meeting of mixed Democrats and Republicans, he lambasted the Democrats and Missourians in general, though he had promised to refrain. When criticized for his lapse, he answered that he hadn't intended to but had been carried away,

because "we may not ever get so many of the sons-of-bitches together again. . . ." [5]

Such deep antagonisms might have disappeared from the political scene earlier, except for the arrival in the Territory of the opportunistic Thomas Francis Meagher.

When General Meagher arrived at the new capital, he received a welcome which the Micks of Nevada City felt due to the famed Irish rebel and which the Union men felt due to a renowned Union General. Anvils rang in every smithy, creating a din that was augmented by the shrieks of delighted urchins and the howls of annoyed dogs, and echoed by the racket of a serenade by the musicians from the Stonewall Hall and the Champion Saloon.

The handsome, though vacuous-looking, foppishly dressed Meagher, in his early forties, was used to the plaudits of such a crowd, having been the chief orator of a semi-revolutionary party in the old country, for which subversive activity he had been transported to Tasmania for life. After his hair-breadth escape from that island and his arrival in this country, he had been hailed as an Irish patriot, a victim of the anti-Union English. He had been in great demand as a speaker in all the cities in the East.

He had edited the *Irish News* and had gone to Central America doing articles for *Harper's Magazine*. During the war he had commanded an Irish brigade which he himself had raised in New York. Following the war, however, nothing he had turned his hand to had come out in the old romantic way. The lucky boy and heedless soldier-of-fortune found himself out of the limelight and without a cause or an opportunity to bolster his reputation as a *doer*. Then, as a complete surprise, came President Johnson's appointment of him as Secretary to the new Territory of Montana. (The job had been offered to two others before him, but this he didn't

know.) This unsought office gave him new hope. When he arrived in Bannack to find Edgerton leaving the Territory, making him Acting Governor, he must have felt that his gods were again favoring him. He entered this completely unfamiliar job with only the briefest of instructions from Edgerton.

The trip from Bannack to Virginia City took eleven hours. When the Acting Governor arrived horse-back, all of the papers of state in his coat pocket, he had a speech ready, composed to take advantage of his new situation. He was escorted into town by a torchlight procession all the way from Nevada City to the "liberty-pole" in front of the Planter's House. There he delivered his talk.

Ever since word of Meagher's appointment had reached the city, Dimsdale had filled paragraphs praising the forthcoming Secretary, for the editor and his beloved Union party were ready to welcome the renowned patriot and Northern officer into the fold. His words that first night gave them little alarm: he said that he belonged to no party—"never could be yoked, broken, coaxed, or otherwise teamed to any party—His party, in a word, were the people of the United States." [6] This he avowed in a cultured voice, affecting a slight lisp. It was a politic speech which left him open to overtures from any party, so he could jump whichever way opportunity lay.

He moved into the little log cabin that was the Governor's Mansion during his stay and was soon joined by his charming wife, a woman described by young Miller as ". . . a very good representation of the grand lady a superb lady very much like a immense work very good to be seen at a proper distance but too large and unwieldy for a life Companion." [7]

For awhile the town was politically quiet. But Governor Edgerton and the first Assembly had left "the acting one" with a nasty Gordian knot. The Republicans wanted him to leave it tied; the Democrats demanded he cut it. The Republicans contended the legislative functions of the Territory had

died, because the first assembly had refused to apportion the Territory and that before the Territory could legally function a new enabling act would have to be passed by Congress. The Democrats, who had controlled the Assembly and now filled all elective offices, contended the legislative function was still intact and held that the Acting Governor had the power to convene the legislature.

At first Meagher publicly sided with the Republicans and refused to fiddle with the knot. But such do-nothingness was foreign to his nature and brought him no publicity. He soon realized that toddling along in the shadow of Sanders, if he continued a Republican, would hardly gain him quick prestige. So, doing an abrupt about-face, he sliced the knot as the Democrats wished, calling a session of the legislature to meet in April of 1866.

He had made a fatal error, for he had incurred the enmity of Sanders, and he had misjudged the doughty Colonel's power in Washington, as well as Washington's desire to make the West Republican. But to Meagher, who ever had chosen the path which led to the limelight, there was no other way. He hoped that here in this wilderness he might once again make a place in the sun for himself. The irony of his decision is that, with Sanders's friendship, he might have been appointed Territorial Governor upon Edgerton's resignation as he so dearly desired. He had gained the support of the majority party of the Territory, but the minority party had the ear of the Congress and the President, with whom the Territory had to deal.

During the early months of his Governorship, Meagher made other errors. Especially flagrant were his errors in personal behavior. Like many another emigrant, he felt he was far from any civilizing, restraining influence, and he let himself go. He gained the reputation of a rowdy and a drunk. His periodic drinking bouts were referred to by the *Post* as

Irish wakes—which he held without the body. He "lost" his father twice, according to the paper.[8] During this period he pardoned the convicted murderer, Daniels, acting while drunk, said Judge Munson. The Vigilantes hanged Daniels, his pardon still in his pocket, and a crude note was pinned to his coat: *If our Acting Governor does this again, we'll hang him too.*

He incurred bitter enemies. William Chumasero, Virginia City attorney, wrote to Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, accusing Meagher of being a vulgar, indecent man, of harboring lewd women in his office, of beastly habits and drunkenness —and furthermore backed up his statements by telling the Senator to use the letter in any way he wanted to.

Meagher further misjudged what were the powers of a territorial governor and what was expected of him. He came to the job with no experience in American politics and with little background in democratic American attitudes. He had no government administrative experience to qualify him. Now, he who had first made his reputation as a champion of the common man became dictatorial in his manner toward anyone who differed with him. When two of the Territorial Judges declared his legislative call illegal, he declared he would enforce any acts of this legislature with all the powers of the Territory, no matter what the judges might say.

He agitated for statehood for the Territory, knowing that his popularity with the Democratic majority would assure him political control—possibly even waft him out of his rural isolation into the Senate at Washington. He called a constitutional convention in the spring of 1866, but nothing came of it, the constitution itself being "lost" on its way to Washington.

Sanders led the fight against Meagher. In a speech during the campaign of '66, he accused Meagher of not filing his bond, thus holding up Congressional appropriations to the

Territory, of illegally using such appropriations when they finally arrived, of drawing drafts on empty depositories, of assembling a bantling legislature, of the impudent denial of rights of courts, judges and lawyers, of the scandalous disregard of the common decencies of life and the abuse of the American people. Sanders finished by saying he merited a stern and fearful rebuke from all decent men in the country.[9] More directly, Sanders carried his fight to the Congress, which revoked all of the acts passed by "Meagher's Legislatures."

When Green Clay Smith was appointed Governor of the Territory in spite of the many letters Meagher had written to President Johnson pleading for the job, the Irishman must have felt that his bid for success had failed. Discouraged, his vanity badly wounded, he took offense at a paragraph in the *Post* and challenged Henry Blake, who had become editor upon Dimsdale's death, to a duel. The objectionable paragraph began, "T. F. Meagher; we understand this notorious individual is en route to Virginia City . . ." and went on to warn him that he would find his political friends gone with the arrival of Governor Smith. Another piece concluded thankfully that at the Governor's reception in his offices at Content's Corner there had been "no political allusions to mar (Meagher) the occasion." In answer to Meagher's challenge, Blake spoke out in print, pointing out to the Secretary that dueling was illegal in the Territory.[10]

After the adjournment of the third Assembly, which Meagher had called but which met during the administration of Governor Smith, it was decided that Smith should return to Washington, where as a former member of Congress, just resigned, he could most effectively lobby for the Territory. Meagher was once again Acting Governor.

Meagher saw himself above all as a soldier, more specifically as a leader of soldiers and as one who fought brilliant battles, but never grappled with problems of tactics or supply.

Since he had first arrived he had continually specified an army as being necessary to the Territory, not only to exterminate the Indians, but also to replace the Vigilantes in their war against road agents. He was right about the necessity for troops in the area, for the Blackfeet were especially warlike and there were no soldiers stationed here to protect the settlers.

His first chance to shine as a militarist came early in 1866 when he called for 500 volunteers to march against the Blackfeet, who were raiding near Fort Benton. To his disappointment, few men volunteered. Who cared about Indians way up yonder when there was gold to be had in Alder Gulch and no Indians to bother?

A year later a bigger chance came to the General. Residents of the Gallatin Valley were alarmed by the threat of Indian raids. John Bozeman wrote the Acting Governor demanding protection for the residents. When Bozeman was killed by Indians a few days later, Meagher saw his chance.

He had repeatedly asked the United States Army for troops. Now he wrote to General Sherman, commander of the Department of the Missouri, asking for permission to raise his own. When he didn't receive it, he tried to raise a militia without it, but Virginia City merchants would not supply him without assurance that they would be paid. Again he wrote to Sherman, telling him of the great danger. At last Sherman relented in part, authorizing citizen troops at forty cents per day per man—they to furnish their own horses and arms!—a completely unrealistic wage in a gold camp.

Meagher ignored the minimum and went about raising his army, asking for 600 mounted and armed men, buying supplies on credit from Virginia City merchants, waving Sherman's telegram in their faces for assurance they would be paid. He spent his credit recklessly, in some cases buying horses and

equipment that did not exist. All in all, he ran up bills which were presented to Congress for a total of $1,100,000. The government finally settled for $513,000, paying for an Indian war which never took place.

Meagher took the field at the head of his "army," spending his days joyously in the saddle, his nights roughing it by the campfire, thoroughly enjoying himself, though he and his volunteers fought nary a battle. As the days in camp grew into weeks, fights occurred right enough, but among the men. Once an officer was killed. A mutiny developed, and desertions became frequent—the men as a rule decamping with supplies and army horses. The entire operation was botched. With the return of Governor Smith in June, Meagher was relieved of his command, his opportunity to make a name for himself fighting Indians gone.

Governor Smith began reorganizing Meagher's command in spite of a report of Major W. H. Lewis, envoy from General Sherman, who had investigated the fracas and reported the whole thing a trumped-up Indian scare. After all, if bills were to be presented to Congress, the Territory could not officially admit the expense had been for nothing.

General Meagher was dispatched to Fort Benton to meet a shipment of muskets he believed was being sent on from Camp Cook and to meet his wife who was coming upstream on the same boat. He arrived on July 1 but the boat was not yet docked.

In Fort Benton he met an Irish friend, an officer on the river boat *G. A. Thompson,* then unloading. He accepted an invitation to sleep on board in one of the staterooms, it being more comfortable than the rude hotel accommodations ashore. During the night he disappeared from the boat and was never heard of again.

The night watchman said he saw a figure in white clamber

down from the upper deck to the lower deck and *jump* into the river, but, the official version, as stated by Governor Smith, was that the General met his death accidentally.

During the afternoon he had been in a highly distraught state of mind, hysterically demanding a gun to defend himself against the people of Fort Benton. He had been put forcibly to bed. Colonel Sanders, who then chanced to be in Fort Benton and in the company of Meagher for a time, stated Meagher was not drinking that day. On the other hand, Colonel Sanders was quite capable of withholding unpleasant facts, if we are to judge him by his written statement, "There is much to conceal . . . in those 'ancient times.' " [11] Perhaps Sanders was unaware of Meagher's drinking. A known heavy drinker may have had his own private supply at hand and nipped at it when unobserved.

Meagher was at the end of his tether: a man of forty-four who all his life had jumped without looking or considering the consequences and, until recently, always had managed to land on his feet. Now he had come a cropper in a backwoods country where he had expected to lead the pack. It is quite possible that the General, in his jangled condition and perhaps under the influence of alcohol, may have jumped, not intending suicide (a doubtful thing in this strong Roman Catholic), but in another wild attempt to escape fate, and, misjudging his strength, accidentally drowned. It is also possible that he made good his escape and disappeared, rather than face a future as Meagher, the *former* hero. On the other hand, he could have been killed by Indians; or he could have died of exposure in the brakes of the Missouri after climbing from the river.

When one considers the bravado of his escape from Tasmania, in which he had warned officers he was going to attempt a getaway and then had waited until they were in sight before galloping off, a planned disappearance from Montana seems possible. For one thing, he had no fear of the water:

his former escape had left him standing on a water-swept ocean shelf for several days. He was evidently a strong swimmer. As for leaving his wife, he had left one behind in Tasmania, also, and, when she appeared in the United States he had packed her off to Ireland to live with his father, where she died in childbirth.

However he left, he was gone from the Montana scene, leaving behind him rancor and emotional political strife. In opposing him and his demagogic tactics, Colonel Sanders had ruined his own popularity and his future chances for important political office, for the majority never forgave him for calling their pet nasty names.

Today, inside the Statehouse in Helena, in the rotunda, is a life-size statue of Colonel Sanders. From where he stands, he can look out the front doors at a heroic statue on the lawn of General Meagher astride a horse, sword raised, still charging at windmills.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WOMANKIND EMANCIPATED! —DANCES, DIVORCES AND BUSTLES

DURING ONE NEVER-TO-BE-FORGOTTEN Christmas season, the b'hoys of the upper gulch, bemused with Yuletide cheer, swore to stand treat for a party to which *every* woman in their districts was to be invited. When the liquor wore off, they realized that such a guest list necessarily would include the beautiful prostitute of Hungry Hollow, and, more daunting, someone would have to escort her there. No one volunteered to bring her, but it graveled the boys to go back on their resolve, so they drew straws to see who would spend the evening with the girl. Amos Hall, later to be mayor of Virginia City, pulled the short straw.

The night of the party, Hall came to her door duded up as though she were the girl of his dreams, for he was determined to make this as good a party and as merry a Christmas for her as for any woman there—in spite of his misgivings. To his relief, the girl who answered his knock scarcely resembled the chit he had invited. The gaudy clothes had been replaced by a sedate gown; the paint was scrubbed from her cheeks. It was with genuine gallantry that Hall walked her to the affair.

The b'hoys had no reason to regret inviting her, for the girl was as demure and formal as mountain etiquette could demand. Folks that came to be titillated went home astounded to find that she acted for all the world just like one of them, so much so, that if (whisper) one hadn't *known,* she might have passed for respectable. What with the games and the songs, the eats and drinks, she soon fitted right into the party—they got used to her—mebbe even liked her a little— Sakes! The party was a great success. Hall took the girl home and bade her good night at her door without so much as kissing her.[1]

The incident is typical of the way custom was continually crumbling under abrasiveness of mining-camp life. Here, a woman found that contact with a prostitute didn't contaminate one's morals. Here, husbands did much of their business in the saloons they never would have entered at home. Here, one simply explained to one's children why the gaily dressed ladies were not nice, and what were those shooting noises. Here, a person had to dance, if she were to belong, even though a person had never dared at home—and, really, it didn't seem so awful, once a person learned.

Dancing was a mania in the gulch, and not entirely by happenstance. During the first months of the stampede, the problem of b'hoy meeting girl was difficult, not only because women were scarce, but also because the usual meeting place, church, was not yet established, and all other community ties, family ties and the like were lacking; there was little place for courtin'. Then somebody started a dancing school, and also started the second stampede to sweep Alder Gulch.

During the winter months, there was hardly a night on which a "dancing school" was not meeting in some mining district or other. Tuesday night it might be at Summit, Wednesday night at Virginia City, Thursday at Highland, and so on, presumably to give each district a chance to learn, but

somehow, the same old crowd showed up every night. Nobody, surely, needed as much dancing instruction as John Grannis, who, according to his diary, often attended class three or four nights running, each night in a different spot. But John had discovered that this was a good prospect on lively ladies, and, being newly divorced, he worked the diggin's for all they were worth. For the ladies, attending "school" was a respectable enough occupation to allow dancing and flirting in the middle of the week. Singing schools also met once a week, Professor Dimsdale running one in competition to Jesse Armitage's. They were nice get-togethers, but they couldn't compare with the pairing off necessary to dance.[2]

Dancing was such a pastime in Virginia City that McClure said in one of his newspaper articles, "I believe that all meetings . . . excepting church and funerals, end in a dance, no matter how they begin." [3] Virginia City became famous throughout the Territory for its balls, dances, and songs, making such competition among the b'hoys for partners to Calico Balls, Masquerade Balls, Legislative Balls, and Fenian Balls that every female from teen-ager to grandmother had to have a ball gown.

Lucky Virginia City gals enjoyed a surplus of men as high as the eight-to-one tallied in the 1870 census; what it had been before, there is no record. News of the great female shortage in the Rocky Mountains aroused hopes in the woman-crowded East and caused one lady to urge a plan of wholesale migration to this more favorable marriage clime. Her letter was answered in the *Montanian:*

> A Massachusetts lady wants to know if we have more men than women in Montana, if so she will contract to furnish as many ladies as Montana will men. She says she is now "twenty-six," and that the preponderance in number of ladies over gentlemen is so great in Massachusetts that she despairs of ever getting a husband in that country,

> and wants to know what we think her chances would be if she were to come to Montana. We think your chances would be good, but we would advise you to wait a year or two, as we have several old maids on hand now, and as they, of course, have the first claim, we should like you, for their sake, to hold off a little. They are trying hard and may make a riffle soon. Should they do so we will notify you.[4]

With such a shortage of women, "speculating on 'splicing' " was always rife, and there were many rumors that "one of the forty-seven marriageable females in this locality is busily engaged in running a Singer on muslin sheets." The Leap Year joshing which appeared in the papers each quartan year meant little here where women were so scarce "that young men now go four days without blacking their boots, don't oil their hair anymore, and wear paper collars a week without turning them." Leap Year editions of the newspapers, however, warned the girls that "Leap Year is fast petering out. Girls and widows who want a loving heart to cling to, and a pair of men's pants to lay over their feet during the cold winter nights, will find it advantageous to begin to talk business pretty soon."

Once a society had been established in town, once people knew each other as neighbors, considerable courtin' was done in the ordinary fashion of the times. Serenading was a popular go for a while. Young swains about town grouped together late in the spring, learning old love songs, trying to harmonize. On balmy summer nights the little band drifted about town, quavering a song or two at the door of the rude cabins of belles of the town (never beneath the window, because two-story houses were rarities here), trudging along the dusty, unromantic, treeless streets between stops, serenading not only innamoratas but also governor, editor, champion fighter, etc., as well, the soft strains of their old tunes sometimes min-

gling with the raucous jangling of near-by saloon music or a parody of their own sentiment bellowed by the irreverent Nightherd, "making the 'night hideous' with their infernal yells."

During the summer months, a favorite outing for couples was a fishing trip to the mouth of Alder Creek. Here came "romantic anglers and maidens from the city to . . . whisper sweet nothings among the bushes, as they tantalize the jolly trout with their awkwardness." Such unaccustomed freedom allowed to young couples resulted in a number of seductions, enough so that Dimsdale felt it necessary to write an editorial under the heading GAY LOTHARIOS. He said that "these gilded serpents are with us, practicing their hellish arts. Several cases the most deplorable have been brought to our special attention." He concluded his item, typically Victorian, by commenting, "better, far better, had the seducer struck a dagger at his victim's heart . . ." [5] Such was the horror of the biological in this hell-raising town.

Dimsdale and his friends could not see that woman was finding new freedom, becoming emancipated, here in Montana. They clung to their old-fashioned ideals in spite of the fact that women were becoming more independent every day. Jobs were plentiful for them and were well-paid in comparison to the East. Dimsdale, not realizing the implications of what he wrote, printing "Advice to Immigrants" in the *Post,* counseled, "Females who can use their hands smartly, are sure of immediate employment at high wages, and a good character will insure not only magnificent pay, but a deferential treatment and a kind attention, before only read of in novels." [6] And employment he spoke of was sometimes the usual woman's work of cooking or acting as servant-girl, but here the latter could command fifty dollars a month, as much as a teamster. But other employment was available. Women tended toll gates; women tended stage stations at the grand salary of

$125 a month. One woman worked shaping horseshoes for Bart the Blacksmith, leading an editor to fret, "When feminines turn Vulcanists and bronco-shoers the worser half will get their deserts . . ." Some women worked side by side with their menfolk in the claim, skirts hiked up, shoveling tailings all the long day. If anything, it was more usual for a woman to work than not, for her help was needed to meet high living costs and to relieve the shortage of labor for jobs men didn't want. If she didn't put her shoulder to the wheel, she was likely to be sneered at, as was Sarah Raymond, who, after arriving, overheard a lady she had just met telling a neighbor, "Some more aristocrats. They didn't come here to work. Going to teach school and play lady." [7]

These working women enjoyed an easy camaraderie with the miners. Single men and women visited back and forth in each other's cabins freely, paying no attention to the stuffy pretensions of newspaper editors and bankers, larking about town as they pleased—a bit of which freedom can be seen in a laconic diary note, ". . . loafed around with Mrs. B. all day."

This freedom resulted in some funny entanglements for the b'hoys. One naïve woman, deficient in her definition of "rape," hailed into court a man who had fondled her a little extra. There it was learned that the gal had been coming to his cabin for swill for her pigs, on which occasions he had kissed her several times, perhaps a little imprudently the last time. The man was discharged, but, according to the *Madisonian,* "the affair has created quite a lively demand among the boys for casks suitable for swill tubs."

On the other hand, the man who tried to take advantage of a lone woman in her cabin might find she had no need of the courts to protect her. One such adventurer ended up with a jackknife in his rear. The paper reported that the woman had "attacked the biggest part of her enemy . . ."

In Virginia City a woman had to put up with mistreat-

ment or neglect no more than she had to be dependent upon a man for an income. The divorce rate climbed to levels astounding to the Victorian eye. McClure noted that "Stray wives figure almost as often in the advertisements as stray cattle; and summons in divorce are about as numerous as the notices of hymeneal knots. The last two legislatures devoted most of their deliberations to the passage of divorce bills." [8] Such action was necessary because there was no divorce law; couples wanting their marital ties sundered had to obtain their divorces by direct action of the lawmakers. A carload of temporary bigamists was created when Congress voided the proceedings of the second and third assemblies, but the couples affected were old married folks by that time and paid little attention to such legalities.

Protestant minister A. M. Hough also commented on the numerous divorces, writing:

> There were a good many weddings at that time in Montana, not that there were many persons to marry, but because the few married often. The newspapers gave "divorces" a standing heading, the same as "marriages" and I have counted the same number of records under each heading. In some instances, a name would appear simultaneously under both headings.[9]

Many of the divorces were undoubtedly due to the increased competition for a lady's favors. An unhappy woman was sure to find a sympathetic male to persuade her he could make her happy again. A mistreated woman might find herself with an entire mining district of protectors: the miners' court in Summit District met upon one occasion to take up the case of McCarty, accused of abusing his family. They found him guilty and banished him from the district, and saw to it that he was walked as far as Nevada City and warned

not to come back. Before long he had walked back again, this time accompanied by lawyers to demand a new trial for him. The miners allowed it, but still couldn't see things his way and booted him down the road once again. This time he stayed gone, and on Sundays, thereafter, sympathetic miners could be found at Mrs. McCarty's helping her fix up her house.[10]

What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander; if men were finding new opportunity and a new life, so could a woman. If she had to take a poke in the eye whenever the master woke up with a bad liver at home, she could counterpunch here. John Grannis spent his first winter in Montana recovering from the low blow he felt his wife had dealt him, thinking ". . . of home I once had But alas for a false Hearted woman I was Betrayed." One morning while traveling to Montana, according to his diary, he "had words with Mrs. Grannis and spatted her on the mouth." By nightfall he was alone in his wagon, for she had joined another wagon train and was headed for Alder Gulch without him.

That year the Mrs. did better on her claim than he did on his, and what was more, she wouldn't allow him around the place. Then she found a nicer man, got her divorce bill through the legislature, remarried, and left John playing the dancing-school circuit for want of companionship.[11]

Mrs. G.'s behavior made her ineligible for the pedestal upon which most of the town leaders believed a woman looked best. It put her outside the pale to a young man who could write in his diary of Dora, child-wife of David Copperfield, "What a perfect picture he draws of a Pure Innocent loving Dear Child-wife. Too fair; too fragile; breaking her heart at an unkind word. A beautifull creation. Almost too beautifull to be real." [12] It made her, in the eyes of some of the town, the same kind of woman which a horrified court had fined for dressing in clothes of the opposite sex, or the same

scandalized court had fined for swearing. It made her the kind of woman that Dimsdale detested, the kind of woman the town was helping to produce, the kind of woman he scorned in a special, interruptive paragraph in his book:

> . . . A woman is queen in her own home; but we neither want her as a blacksmith, a plough-woman, a soldier, a lawyer, a doctor, nor in any such professions or handicraft. As sisters, mothers, nurses, friends, sweethearts and wives, they are the salt of the earth, the sheet anchor of society, and the humanizing and purifying element in humanity. As such they cannot be too much respected, loved and protected. But from Blue Stockings, Bloomers and strong-minded she-males generally, "Good Lord, deliver us." [13]

But Mrs. Grannis didn't mind. She found a rootless, affluent society full of opportunity for her to live her own life; she took the step that perhaps she never could have made at home, for financial reasons if none other. She was a pioneer suffragette, but she didn't know it.

Across streets ankle-deep in dust and manure, Virginia City ladies dragged stylish skirts. Down boardwalks splintery and wobbly, Virginia City girls tripped in boots proper to the paving of the East. Through mountain gales that shook flimsy buildings, Virginia City matrons struggled, holding the latest bonnets and coiffures in place. Woman's vanity had come west with her.

Woman's concern with fashion and feminine frills set this goddess on her feet of clay and treated her to considerable joshing in the newspapers: " 'Oh Death where is thy sting! O grave where is thy victory!' Clark puts a looking-glass in coffins ordered for women."

Goddesses of course had no reality in body, so a lady's

anatomy was seldom referred to—except *limbs* and, occasionally, *bosoms*. Ladies' underclothing was a delightful mystery:

> "Chemile," "shemlin," "chimi-drawers," "getin," "chimjupe" and "chemiloon" are among the proposed names for the new what-d'ye-call-ems introduced by the female dress reformers. We don't want to be captious about trifles, but the use of such abominable language ought to constitute sufficient grounds for a divorce.
>
> —*Montanian* 1875

> "Emancipation Undersuits" and "Sanitary Corsets," are articles of feminine gear for which prizes were awarded at the recent California State Fair. We don't know anything about such truck, but presume that the first named article is intended to effect the emancipation of the male sex from the rule of "petticoat government." If so, we don't approve of it.
>
> —*Montanian* 1875

> It is said that the habit of wearing garters is killing hundreds of women. Take off your garters, girls—or, if the trouble and fatigue are too much for you, come around and we'll take them off for you.
>
> —*Madisonian* 1875

No doubt about it, the fashion notes of the day were intended for the delight of masculine readers, not for the advice of ladies. No patterns, no learned charm articles, no descriptions of the latest fashion filled the local pages of Madison County weeklies. Women's dress was the material for masculine comedy—in yesterday's comic newspaper story as in today's cartoon.

Other mysteries of feminine dress were the gadgets designed to provide what nature hadn't:

FALSE CALVES, BOSOM AND PLUMPERS.—A Mississippi paper has the following: The various false calves are rendered necessary by the new style of "tilting hoops," which go far toward exposing what was before only dreamed of, or existed only in imagination. In the language of an exchange:

> "These calves are not a fleeting show,
> For man's illusion given,
> They're filled with brand, or stuffed with tow,
> And swell about a foot or so,
> And look first rate, by heaven."

The false bosoms are made of fine wire in the shape of a bird's nest, with a small spring in them, and really look and feel quite natural.

The plumpers are fastened on the teeth in such a manner as to make the face look round and plump, and are calculated to deceive the unsuspecting. Young gentlemen need have no fears as regards the ladies in this section—they are all right and need no artificial fixins.

—*Montana Post* 1866

LOW-NECKED DRESSES AND TILTING HOOPS.—. . . In this country low-necked dresses have never found as much favor as in France or England. Whether it is on account of superior modesty or inferior physical development, the wise must determine. Certain it is, that with low dresses, American women almost invariably affect puffed lace in the shape of capes or chemisettes, and in this way get the credit for a roundness of form that they rarely possess. . . .

—*Montana Post* 1867

Madison County editors, joshin' the "b'hoys," had publicized feminine fixin's almost a hundred years before Madison Avenue made falsie a household word—or appliance.

The miners may have thought these feminine attachments were about as funny as any could get, but they hadn't seen nothin' yet.

When the first bustles swayed across the corner of Wallace and Jackson streets, a gasp of masculine indignation rustled the pages of the *Madisonian.* Tom Deyarmon, the editor, called the bustle the "most detestable contrivance that fashion has ever forced and perpetuated upon female humanity."

> . . . If a lady appears on the street or in the ball room wearing a bustle, she is made the subject of ridicule. If without one, she is no less the subject of remark, because fashion has decreed that she shall wear one. Without one she is declared out of fashion; with one, either standing or walking, she is a misshapen object of derision. She cannot sit down in one, with comfort; but sit she will, and when she does, it is at the risk of being pierced and gouged, and scratched with a detached wire or whalebone of which the skeleton of the modern bustle is composed.
>
> —*Madisonian* 1877

That bobbling protuberance behind was an unwieldy thing in a buggy seat, a thing dangerous to squeeze by in a store aisle and a clumsy thing to keep one's eye on when closing the door behind. It tickled the fun-loving boys. The only use for such an appendage was obvious. Some coarse bard aptly stated it in this ditty:

> Bustles are but a fleeting show,
> To vex a man's calm reflection;
> Whether of wire, rags or tow,
> How they're made, he may never know
> Without minute inspection.
> They're worn to churches and to balls—
> To dinners and to evening calls—

And if the wearer slips and falls,
We s'pose they're some protection.

—*Madisonian* 1876

This "s'pose they're some protection" attitude was typical of the entire nation's feeling toward that ludicruous bundle lumped over the derriere—but especially in the mountain West: "A lady's bustle is said to be the newest thing in the world—because it was never seen *before,*" quipped the *Montanian.* It was the *behindness* that was irresistible to the wags.

Whether campaigning from door to door for a fence to keep cattle out of the graveyard or parading across the stage in an amateur theatrical, the bustled lady rankled masculine observers. There was something so danged impractical about it on the frontier. Certainly the woman harnessed into one could neither board nor sit a buckboard with any security. Even pew-sitting was difficult:

> A young lady, marble-topped, dipped, and powdered to perfection, attired in a late-style "Seymour" pull-back costume, attempted to sit down in one of our churches the other Sabbath. She failed to reach the seat by many inches, but seemed to rest in the air, just as well as though she'd got down on the seat. Pull-backs act as pull-ups sometimes.
>
> —*Madisonian* 1875

However, in comparison to the unwieldy hoop which had floated about camp only a few years before, the bustle seems fairly innocuous. Why such a ruckus? An explanation is that it just plain upset the male equilibrium:

> The fashion editor of a New York exchange offers the following advice, which should be borne in mind in any country: "Ladies who wear bustles should fasten the thing

down, and not meander the streets with a huge bundle bobbing up and down, and wriggling from side to side behind. It looks ridiculous, and, besides with so many beads and bugles on it, is apt to make a person walking in the rear cross-eyed!"

—*Madisonian* 1875

But jibes nor sneers, nor raillery shall swerve the course of fashion, and the ladies of Virginia continued to push out behind. The "huge bundle," however, was often not made of "rags or tow"—or whalebone either. It was suggested that they be made of cork:

Jennie June, the fashion writer, suggests cork bustles for the ladies, whereupon the naughty editor for North-West says "that's one way to put a 'stopper' on the woman's movement."

—*Montanian* 1874

More often the Virginia City bustle was made of none of these materials. Being miles from stores where proper bustles could be purchased, the dears often used rolls of old newpaper to give the proper protuberance. The habit was soon made public:

The funny man of one of our exchanges, at a party the other night, says he "set every woman in the house feeling the back of her head by holding up a 'switch' of false hair." He could have had twice as much fun by holding up a roll of old newspapers.

—*Montanian* 1873

. . . a scene the like of which hasn't been seen since . . . whisky sold for 3 cents a drink and woman was pretty enough without piling newspapers on the small of her back.

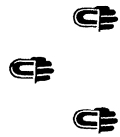
—*Montanian* 1872

Here was something new for the b'hoys. How many of the sidewalk experts followed the swaying bundles with new appreciation? How many made side bets on whether or not it was the "real thing?" Such intimate knowledge of what went on behind found its way into a naughty item in the *Montanian.* It tried to clothe its naughtiness behind codification but, well, notice the * :

> *Honi soi qui mal y pense.* The New North-West in referring to the ladies using newspapers to create a bustle in society, says that "this thing of getting a little behind, won't do for progressive newspapers." We had rather see 'em used for that, than all go to *waist,* Capt; though we advise those Deer Lodge girls who use the North-West, to beware of the I's, pull the stings out of the B's, amputate the ☞, be Y's and unless they have an *, keep U at a safe distance, B-K's else they'll ne'er know P's or E's again. We C U & U O us 1. "Check."
>
> —*Montanian* 1873

The seventies would have been dull without the bustle. The b'hoys should have been grateful for it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



THE RISK-TAKERS OF TRADE

A VIRGINIA CITY MERCHANT had to be a combination of capitalist, gambler and seer—and more than one-third seer. The businessman of Virginia City in the 1860's had no sure way to plan his business since "One year presents no data for the next, and everything goes by surges or waves to fortune or disaster. . . . Business ebbs and flows to a degree unknown in old centers of trade and sudden wealth and as sudden bankruptcy sweep close upon each other." [1] Bacon was known to drop from $1.25 per pound to sixty-five cents per pound in ten days' time.[2] The Virginia City merchant, with no figures to guide him, was forced to order for a year ahead, because freight moved only during the summer, via wagon train or Missouri River steamboat. Somehow he hoped to make an estimate of the next season's influx of emigration, determine what items would be short, make arrangements to get his goods on the market early, and, after Gallatin Valley farms and flour mills began producing, judge what influence local produce would have on his purchases. All of this had to be done in a little isolated town which was doing more business than its "neighbor" to the south, Denver.[3]

The Virginia City merchant-speculator was forced to buy in large amounts, for he was purveyor to the Territory. His fine stock of goods attracted customers from every direction (prices were lower in Virginia City). Miners from all over the Territory came to town to purchase supplies. Merchants in little hideaway gulches came to town to procure wagon-loads of stock for their shelves at the city's attractive wholesale prices. To meet this demand, storekeepers along Wallace Street purchased shoes not by the dozen but by the wagon-load, Gurney & Company unloading eight wagons of shoes at once. Flour was purchased by the wagon train; at one time twenty-seven wagons of it were unloaded into Pfouts and Russell's "fireproof." (These "fireproofs" were merchants' only insurance against a conflagration which easily could destroy the major portion of this flimsy town. Most of their stock was kept in these structures, a good one being built of stone with "ventilated passage, closed at each end by iron doors of two thicknesses of plate, separated by a layer of charcoal.")

These men are a little difficult to understand in these days of specialists, of formal training for a specific occupation which will become the line of work to be followed, usually, for life. These men were non-specialists. If they were trained they did not necessarily stay with that for which they had schooled. They turned a hand to whatever opportunity arose. A man easily could be a miner, then a storekeeper, take a turn at running a newspaper and end up by operating a bank —or he could do all these at once. The really successful man was the one who could keep a number of irons heated at once and have time to shape each while it was hot.

But the odds were that he would trip over some unseen obstruction between forge and anvil. As we have seen, transportation costs might almost double if his freight failed to make it to Fort Benton. If his freight was late, he might be forced to sell under cost in order to free his obligations. If he

had figured wrong, the market could be glutted with what he had thought would be short, forcing him to sell at St. Louis prices. In the spring of 1867, McClure noted, "Some merchants have been compelled to borrow money at from ten to twenty per cent per month to pay freight at Fort Benton and then sold their goods at a loss of fifty to seventy-five per cent to meet their obligations."[4] In addition to these risks, merchants were forced to grubstake many miners in order to keep claims working, and often failed to collect many of these debts.

In spite of these enormous risks, there were "General Merchandise" signs on every street: Dance and Stuart, Tootle & Leach, Ohlenhausen & Co., Rockfellow & Dennee, Pfouts & Russell, to name just a few. They carried such fine merchandise they led Morley to remark in his diary, in the fall of 1864, that "the market is so well stocked that all the necessaries and many luxuries can be obtained . . ."[5]

Naturally, the reason for the number of men in the merchandising business and the fine stock available in spite of the risks involved was the phenomenal income to be derived from one of these stores. It was not at all unusual for gold to be taken by the pound over the counter at any Virginia City wholesale house (everyone sold both wholesale and retail). In more than one store, sales averaged over $1,000 per day. As an example, John S. Rockfellow's sales for forty-one days in August and September of 1865 were $41,386.93.[6] At one time a partner of Tootle & Leach took gold dust east to the tune of $60,000, "all he could handle, the net profits since his last trip to St. Joseph."[7]

These profits, it should be remembered, were made after the heyday of 1863-4, many of the miners having left Alder Gulch for the diggings of Last Chance Gulch and Blackfoot. In Nevada City in the same year of 1865 every other store had a "To Rent" sign on it and most of the population of

Junction City four miles below was also gone. The income of Virginia City stores must have been even greater a year earlier.

In a town of now not over 5,000 people, these merchants could lay their hands on tremendous amounts of capital, for their day—or for our day. In the fall of 1866, one firm bought of another merchandise worth $112,000.[8] In November, 1865, when Captain Sawyer arrived in town with a fifty-seven-wagon outfit seven months out from Missouri, Higgins and Haggedorn purchased the entire train, including Schuttler wagons, contents, and the animals that pulled them.[9] This was an outlay of at least $75,000 for goods alone, besides fifty dollars apiece for the wagons, $2850, and an estimated $25,000 for the thousand head of oxen necessary for such a train.

Obviously, much of the wealth of Virginia City lay in her trade, and the merchants came away with a lion's share. Not only did these speculators fleece the miners, they did pretty well shearing pilgrims and tourists as well. Everyone who came to see the elephant brought a little money to the wilderness hamlet, and left it in the hands of the storekeepers before they returned home. If they brought greenbacks with them, the storekeeper was doubly happy, for he took them in at a discount, but purchased his goods with them in the East at the higher eastern face value. When one considers the turnover in population in Alder Gulch, and that for a good many years most emigrants entered the Territory through the town, it is obvious that "tourists" accounted for much of the storekeepers' profit.

As the placer mines dwindled, and the quartz mines were remiss in opening, Virginia City's trade became increasingly important to her welfare. As early as June, 1865, the *Post* began placing stress on the town as a business center, urging retailers to buy in Virginia, publicizing their market

by reporting a big turnover in new goods for new mining camps, pointing out that everyone came to the capital to buy. Later in the year it reported local businessmen going after the Blackfoot (Creek) trade. At about the same time, Rockfellow opened branch stores in Bannack and Argenta. Nobody, but nobody, outsold Virginia City.

Rents for places of business were high. The two-story stone buildings in town rented for $400 to $500 per month. The primitive Planter's Hotel rented to the lessee for $200 per month. The Masonic Hall, built at a cost of $22,000 and finished in 1867, rented immediately for $4,000 per year—lower floor only. If a man wanted to buy a place to go into business, he was asked as high as $8,000 for a "little, one-half story log store room with a dirt roof." [10]

All of these prices are given in gold dust, the established medium of exchange in the Gulch, and in the Territory. At first there was little currency and coin in the region because of its isolation. Gold was worth thirty dollars an ounce in barter for any goods a man could buy. Then gold fell to as low as sixteen dollars an ounce. Disgusted with this price, the miners of Nevada City District set the price of gold at $18 an ounce at a meeting held on January 15, 1864—the day after Virginia City's wholesale hangings. Later on speculators entered the economic picture, buying gold for resale on the eastern market, enjoying a premium of thirty-three to forty-seven per cent for the risk of a possible fall in price of gold and transporting the stuff through the wilderness. With the arrival of these "bankers" and of greenbacks the price of gold varied from $26 to $18 per ounce.

Gold dust used as money was far from satisfactory as a means of exchange, but it was great fun for the individual who worried little about such theories. Almost any miner loved to throw a poke of dust on the bar and pour out a generous stream of the yellow stuff in payment for drinks for the house.

Men who had come two thousand miles into the wilderness for gold were not to be satisfied with measly paper money. They wanted their gold swinging cosily from its pull string, close enough to be touched, displayed—and spent.

Yet, during every transaction they lost a little dust to the seller above the purchase price. Gold dust was accepted on all purchases of twenty-five cents on up. This minimum amount was seldom measured, it was a "pinch" or "two bits." For larger purchases the dust was measured out approximately on a balancing gold scale against a proper weight. It was then placed in blowers, two rectangle pieces of metal with lips folded up on three sides. The dust was blown from one to the other of these shallow trays, any light foreign material falling out—and of course some miniscules of gold, also. In a number of small purchases, this might amount to a considerable per cent: "Let anyone take the trouble to weigh out $10 of merchantable dust, and expend it in small sums, keeping note of the amounts—and he will be satisfied that there is considerable reason for the reluctance by capitalists to change the present system." [11]

Certainly there was a great demand for carpeting to place under gold scales, carpeting with a deep nap in which errant gold flakes could settle. Mrs. Wilbur Fiske Sanders gave up her Brussels carpeting bit by bit to saloonkeepers who pleaded with her most eloquently to sell small sections to grace their bars, and paid her well for them. These elegant scraps were placed under their scales and when thought thoroughly saturated with the valuable stuff they were burned and the gold recovered from the ashes. Even the sweepings from such a place were valuable. After especially drunken nights the sweepings from a hurdy-gurdy house had been known to pan out from $50 to $100 in spilled dust. In later years the flooring of old buildings was burned to recover the impregnated gold, and the ground underneath panned as well.

The remains of the Pony Saloon panned from thirty-five cents to eighty-five cents to the pan, according to the newspaper.

As it passed from hand to hand gold dust tended to deteriorate in a manner in which no exchange medium should. Foreign matter invariably got mixed in with the true gold, sometimes by accident and sometimes deliberately. The most successful adulterations were done with filings of galvanized copper, which were difficult to detect by the acid-bath method of discovering bad gold, and by addition of sand. In most cases, dust which had gone through a number of hands, the last holder, unless wise, suffered from the deterioration of the dust, even though it had not been deliberately tampered with.

Fraudulent weights were substituted for honest ones by unscrupulous traders. The unwary purchaser was relieved of extra gold in order to make the scales balance. Outstanding operator of this sort was the popular "Count" Murat, nephew of Joachim Murat, made King of Naples by Napoleon. This "real count" came to Montana Territory with all of the instincts of a true follower of the rapacious conqueror. He operated the Arcade Saloon in the early days of the camp. He was patronized by all the innocents who liked to pay for the privilege of gazing at aristocracy across a bar. In a few short months he weighted himself down with all the gold he could portage out of the mountains. The town wept to see this, the most popular of its citizens, pull up stakes.

Several weeks later he was the barber to the upper crust of Denver when a startling report appeared in the Virginia City *Post*, written by his former friend, Editor Dimsdale:

> —Count, (H. Murat) we kindly remember thee for sundry and diver's drinks taken in your Arcade for which we paid on your scales, with extra heavy weights. Your successor having found these weights, placed them in the

hands of some officers, who showed them to us. You have got $8,000 gulch dust, have you? [12]

The Count's friends in Denver refused to believe the upstart *Post*'s scoop. He remained mum, but kept a wary eye on strange customers who talked of Montana gold fields. Virginia City soon elected a "Sealer" to check weights about the town.

Even unadulterated gold dust was not worth the same amount per ounce from one poke to the next, that from some local gulches assaying some silver, while other gulches might produce a dust containing platinum, which shot its worth up considerably. To the expert, the dust from each gulch had characteristics of its own—coloring varied from pale yellow to dark; the shape of the flakes varied also, some being flatly smooth, others rounded; while dust from a third gulch might be rough, not having been worn down. Gold out of Alder Gulch contained a lot of natural sand. The experienced storekeeper and banker knew his gold or hired an expert who did. He paid as little for his gold as he possibly could. If the miner was not expert, he had to take what he could get for it. The merchant and banker also took advantage of the unwary and inexperienced by taking in high-grade dust but always giving out low-grade.

With all these variances it is not remarkable that Isaac Moore, cashier of one of the local "banks" found that, busy as he was selling "one man currency or green backs as you call them, the next a draft, the next gold dust and the next gold coin, the next a Foreign draft on London, Dublin or Germany and perhaps the very same day buy[ing] back drafts, gold dust and currency" and though "I have never made the slightest mistake in the cash or in any business transaction . . . it is more trouble and difficult to keep the gold dust right than all the balance of the business." [13] Incidentally, the local

buildings which boasted the sign BANK were mostly depositary institutions in which a miner could put his dust for safekeeping, and more especially institutions which were speculating in the buying and selling of gold. Only occasionally did they loan money or grubstake a miner.

"The few greenbacks and treasury notes brought into the country were a commodity, and bought and sold at market price," noted Granville Stuart.[14] The price of greenbacks on the Virginia City market during the first months after the strike was fifty per cent of face value. Consequently, they weren't worth much to the man who brought them from the East as capital, but they were much in demand by speculators. Merchants, taking them in at the discounted value, could send them east to purchase goods and be allowed, if not their face value, at least much more than the Virginia City rate, making a double profit on each greenback transaction. A miner working for wages could make from twenty to fifty per cent more by buying greenbacks, if he could, and sending them home to his family. A letter from Carswell to Duncan in 1864, illustrates this speculative attitude: ". . . write and let me know how the paper money is in the States . . . if I can send you any money I can buy greenbacks here from fifty cents to fifty-five cents on the dollar." [15]

Greenbacks were accepted at par as early as 1865, but only in the Idaho Billiard Saloon, and then presumably only in payment for games, for the paper commented: "He has only a few imitators. In general business it will not quite pay." The currency was still being discounted fifteen per cent in 1867 when John Rockfellow broke with tradition and started accepting at par in his stores. Others soon followed.

It had been suggested early that greenbacks be accepted at par. A big decline in the price of gold in the East during 1865 resulted in most miners holding their dust from the Virginia City market, causing a lull in trade. The paper sug-

gested accepting greenbacks at par as a permanent cure to the speculative nature of the town's economy: "The loss in paying small sums in gold, the varying value of trade dust, and the perpetual frauds in weight should be enough to force the necessity of the measure."[16] At that time, greenbacks did increase in value, only to fall again soon, and to increase again briefly in the springs of 1866 and 1867, after which they stayed at about the same value as in the East. By this time there were more greenbacks available to the Territory, the monetary needs of the federal government not being so great as during and immediately following the war.

There were other difficulties that imperiled the financial stability of the town. Each fall the place was almost drained of its medium of exchange as merchants and bankers shipped east all the gold they could, fearful of a drop in prices if they kept it through the winter. In addition to this, each miner and worker leaving the Territory carried with him some of the wealth of the town. Greenbacks were always short, being sent back east as fast as they arrived, and often when fall came they would be almost non-existent, as in 1867 when McClure noted, "Just now the Territory is drained of one million of greenbacks to pay freights."[17]

As a result of this eastward tendency of both dust and greenbacks, Virginia City was left poverty-stricken during the winter months. There was not enough gold in town to serve as money "for the encouragement of trade or even the remuneration of labor." The placers were producing no gold during the freeze-up. Such a condition left the town at the mercy of the few "capitalists," who then could take advantage of any opportunity "secure from all competition, by the want of dust in all pockets but their own"—so complained the *Post* in March of 1865.[18] On the other hand, it should be noted that there was little need for money for the remuneration of labor during the winter, "as there is no work or employ-

ment but for a very few men here in the winter, I could get fifty men in a days time if I wished who would gladly work until spring for their board." [19] In fact, the few quartz mines took advantage of this oversupply of labor to hire good miners at fifty dollars a month (one-fourth of their summer wage) to get out ore during the winter months to be worked through the crusher in the summer.

The discrepancy between gold dust and greenback values also caused considerable headaches for the first Territorial courts. Smart operators took advantage of the discounting of the value in greenbacks to try to pay off contracts in legal-tender currency, when the creditor had expected to be paid in dust. The courts necessarily decided this was perfectly legal, that a contract could be paid off in treasury notes at face value, unless the contract specifically stated an amount of gold dust due in weight, in which case payment would be made in the value of gold dust in greenbacks on the day of the trial, plus interest. The first Legislative Assembly made gold dust or bullion legal tender in payment of contracts, but nevertheless much of the time of the early courts was taken up haggling over the terms of hastily written contracts.

Still another factor contributed to the precariousness of the merchants' position: the numerous bad debts with which they had to contend. It was easy for a debtor to skip the country, hence there was little assurance a loan would ever come back. Who was to know the "credit rating" of one's neighbor on such short acquaintance as in a mining camp? Grubstaking was a gamble, not an investment.

These difficulties made the going interest rate usurious. Five to ten per cent a month was not uncommon. Yet, with so many speculative opportunities arising, the man without capital of his own was glad to pay these high rates, for if all went right, his profit would be so great he could easily afford it.

Jim Miller, an eighteen-year-old lad who arrived in Vir-

ginia City via Salt Lake so broke he had to talk his way past the toll gate below Nevada City, did very well for himself in two years, by speculating with borrowed money. He didn't work overly hard making his capital, and had the time of his young life enjoying the social life of this very social city. Jim had come west to make enough money to take him to Paris to see the Exposition set for 1867.

He had several lean days in town before he went to work as a counter jumper in John Rockfellow's store at $100 per month plus board. As soon as possible he started gambling on the local market, sending money to Salt Lake City via friends to buy goods. On September 30, 1865, only three months after his arrival, his diary records a profit of ninety-four dollars on the sale of dried peaches and apples to his employer and notes his present capital as $280.

By the following June he had sold two and one-half tons of salt at fifteen cents a pound, for which he had paid eight cents, "which," he crowed, "makes my present worth $558\frac{14}{}$ a gain of $563\frac{14}{}$ since June 8th a very good profit considering that my salary is only $\$125\frac{00}{}$ per month." For this transaction he had "borrowed $375 from Jas. Clasby at 5% pr. mo. giving him as collatteral my watch and a receipt for the Salt Lake Goods."

By the end of the year the youth had acquired $1197 and by the time he left for France he had $2000 in his jeans. Even with this wad, he offered his services as messenger to several banks in Virginia City and Helena, and thus received $110 from them for carrying gold, thus securing "part of my expenses at least to the states." [20]

His capital was not acquired in the Horatio Alger tradition, so dear to the nineteenth-century heart, of hard work, abstinence and pinching pennies. On the contrary, the billiard halls saw a lot of this lad (where he played for MONEY!), he drank more than he should and he frittered his money away on girls, socials and clothes. True, he was constantly filled with

remorse, and resolves to reform (particularly to shun the cursed billiard halls) but he found the temptations around him too much. He prospered in spite of himself—with Rockfellow's good advice, an aptitude for marketing, and a local market made for gambling.

The speculator kept a lot of the miner's gold for himself, but the carefree miner was not a man to higgle over prices. As a rule there was little grumbling on his part about prices changed and profits made by merchants. But once, in the spring of '65, the speculators got a leetle out of hand and had to be slappped down.

It all had to do with the price of flour. Editor Dimsdale had seen there was going to be a shortage in this essential item. Early in the fall of 1864 he had warned the populace to stock up on food, for there was a great influx of new arrivals in town each day, and the daily wants of the people were in excess of the daily food arrivals at that time. Then in October he noted, "Flour went up $4.00 the morning of the snow. If it continues to go up as the snow comes down, where will it stop." The four-dollar addition to the price of flour made the cost of a 100-pound sack twenty-four dollars to twenty-six dollars. By November 26th it was quoted at twenty-eight dollars, and continued to rise all winter until it reached forty dollars a sack by April 8, 1865.

At this price, complaining against the speculators became more than grumbling, and an attempt was made to seize bakers' flour in Nevada City, but Sheriff Neil Howie foiled it. The *Post* now played Pollyanna, saying that prices weren't so bad: flour at one time had been eighty dollars in Colorado and "while the People of Virginia City are complaining of forty dollars for a sack of flour, the latest advices from the Last Chance Country quote flour at fifty-three dollars per sack."

Wagon trains of flour which would have relieved the shortage were caught in Beaver Canyon in a blizzard in which

all of the oxen perished. Now there was no relief in sight. It had been an unusually snowy winter, Chinook winds "refused to blow" and accumulated snow lay two feet deep in the valleys and five and six feet deep on mountain passes, blocking any further caravans.

Flour prices climbed to fifty-five dollars as speculators gambled with the few remaining sacks available. The morning of April 16, 1865, the market opened ten dollars higher than the previous market day, at sixty-five dollars, and by closing it was five dollars higher. On April 17th flour was seventy-five dollars a sack by 10 A.M., eighty dollars by 11 A.M., and before noon it had climbed to eighty-five dollars, with some offered at ninety dollars.

The thin ribbon of Wallace Street was knotted with lumps of excited men talking about one thing, the corner on flour. Each time a new man joined a group a new rumor was started. One of the most prevalent was that flour had been on its way, but that a speculator named Dorris had ridden down the Salt Lake Road, buying it up all along the way, in order to keep the price up in Virginia City.

The groups grew larger and more excited on the 18th of April, as the market went on a rampage and flour sold at one dollar a pound, according to the conservative market report of the *Post,* although Granville Stuart reported the price at one dollar and fifty cents a pound. It continued at these outrageous prices throughout this day and the next—although the *Post* reported a market drop to eighty dollars per hundred pounds on the 19th, "due to current reports of new speculators."

If the drop in price occurred, it was more likely due to the current reports of a column of 500 armed Nevada City men, marching the mile to Virginia City, led by a mounted man carrying a staff from which fluttered a symbolic empty flour sack.

The rumor proved true. What has come to be known as the

"Virginia City flour riots" had begun—a gross exaggeration of what occurred. The column of methodical men had no riotous intentions. They marched into town quietly, divided into groups of six, each headed by a captain, and proceeded to search for and seize flour wherever it was stored, "going through the matter as quietly as if it were seizing by order of the court." Flour was found concealed under floors and under haystacks, which led the *Post* to editorialize, "we do not endorse the concealing of flour under floors or haystacks when the article is up to the present price."

The seized flour, a disappointing 175 sacks, was stored in Leviathon Hall overnight under an armed guard. Three claimants, a boardinghouse keeper, a baker and a private family, presented argument to the new holders of flour that their flour had been wrongly seized, and their portion of the confiscated commodity was returned to them. During the evening the disgruntled, dispossessed flour speculators met in the court room, to determine a course of action for regaining their merchandise. The only decision they could come to was that they had been done wrong, that their feelings were hurt and that they should adjourn.

Flour was sold by the committee all during the next day, in twelve-pound lots, to any person who swore he had none and could get none. Families were allowed twice and three times as much. At the end of the day the committee paid all parties from whom flour had been taken at the rate of $27 for Salt Lake flour and $30 for St. Louis flour. It was decreed that any flour coming in should not be sold at a price exceeding $50.

The speculators supposedly lost an estimated six cents a pound in actual hard cash due to the seizure of their flour—perhaps a total of $1,000 among them. No pity was wasted on them. Dimsdale's editorial for the week condoned the flour seizure, saying in part:

> . . . Now no law (did such an one exist) can make right out of that which is morally wrong, and in view of the severity of the winter and the impossibility of a miner's earning money for the support of his family, the raising of the price of flour at such a time, by combination and speculative purchase, is a wrong that should insure lasting ignominy to the perpetrators . . . We might as well repeal all laws against road agents. . . .[21]

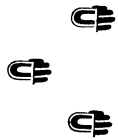
Lest news of the "riot" in Virginia City should frighten freighters loading flour for the town, Paris F. Pfouts, merchant and mayor of Virginia, published a newspaper proclamation in the same issue as Dimsdale's editorial to all freighters and travelers assuring them there was no danger in coming to Virginia City, and that their persons and their property would be protected. In an item immediately below the proclamation, the mayor shook his fist and stamped his foot at the citizenry, warning them that mobs would be dispersed at all cost and that all male citizens were subject to call of the sheriff "in this matter," a great show now that the barn was empty.

Justice had been done, some people had enough flour for a few loaves of bread and the whole thing had provided a little excitement for a dull season of the year. It all had very little effect on flour prices in Alder Gulch, however. The very day of the distribution in Leviathon Hall, E. W. McVeal's account book for his store in Summit lists flour sales at ninety cents a pound, a price at which it held for three more weeks.[22] The first new flour arrived in town May 13th and promptly sold at $58 to $62, eight to twelve dollars above the commandments of the Committee, but what the hell, the frost was out of the ground, the placers could be worked, who cared about the price of flour now? By June enough flour was on hand for prices to return to normal.

The respectable firms in town, Rockfellow and Dennee, Dance & Stuart, Tootle & Leach, Pfouts & Behm and others,

played no part in juggling the price of the staff of life and cannot be blamed for the gouging in flour prices. Some of these men had a dream for the town and had invested their future in it. They were not about to try to ruin their fellow citizens. They had far more at stake here than the peripatetic speculator, miner or merchant, whose aim was to get gold and be

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



BOUNCES UNLIMITED: THE STAGE LINES

THE SHORTCUT between Virginia City and Helena subtracted twenty-five miles from the trip, but it meant a climb up Boulder Hill at a slow walk, a loss of time the stagecoach drivers tried to make up by lettin' 'er rip down the far side at a stomach-fluttering gallop. B'hoys who were used to mountain coach rides learned, in the manner of bridgeworkers who never look down, to think of other things on this ride, forget the trees and rocks whizzing by or the dizzying drop at curve edge and to hang on for dear life. Thus one morning a coach load of them, failing to see the driver sail into the brush on one side of the descending coach or the shotgun messenger bounce from his seat and land at the side of the road, rode 'er out all the way to the bottom of the hill, not noticing a jolt of difference between this ride and the usual jarring descent, unaware of their driverless condition until the runaways, galloping along the valley road, were stopped after almost overrunning the Oliver Company coach ahead of them. Like most coach passengers in the Territory, they had expected to be tumbled about in exchange for being moved quickly from one place to another.

Stagecoaches in Montana were popular for one reason only: S-P-E-E-D. Otherwise, there was little excuse for riding them. They were expensive, dangerous, erratic, jam-packed vehicles which offered a minimum of comfort for the sake of swiftness. They were necessary because distances were great and speculative opportunities awaited the early bird. They were especially popular with Virginia City merchants, who journeyed hundreds of miles about the Territory, checking on branch stores, taking orders, meeting freight in Fort Benton, or making contacts in the latest gold camp, dropping in on settlements 200 miles away as if they were calling on nearest neighbors. Some merchants also left town for the States each fall and returned each spring, thus avoiding the winter doldrums both in business and spirit, and sometimes putting themselves a scratch ahead of their stay-at-home competitors by being able to bid on the spot for the latest merchandise. The stagecoaches were useful to politicians who wanted to make their faces known in all of the diggings, as well as by Territorial delegate and lobbyist who coached part of the 5000-mile round trip to Washington, D. C., to plead the Territory's needs before Congress. Mining speculators and b'hoys who had all they wanted, anyone in a hurry for any reason, who could afford the ticket, used the coach—for then as now, time was money. They developed a gadabout habit and a disdain for distance which Montanans still have.

There were enough of these men in a hurry to allow several companies to make a profit bouncing them about the Territory. A. J. Oliver Co. was the first into Virginia City, operating daily stages between it and Bannack within weeks after Fairweather had found his lucky scad, following soon after with a tri-weekly line to Salt Lake City. Peabody and Caldwell also braved road-agent guns to run competing lines to Bannack and to Utah. A third company, Egnell's, new in '64, carried anyone in Virginia City who had business in Prickly Pear

or Silver City, while McCarthy's Express left every Thursday for French Gulch via Silver Bow.

Oliver & Company said they could make it to Salt Lake City in four days, but if a b'hoy wanted to get there that fast, he had to be willing to pay $150 in greenbacks for his ticket, about seventy-five dollars in dust.[1] Ten people crammed into a Concord coach, as they frequently were, were worth $1500 to Oliver three times a week going and three times a week coming, a most profitable venture. The beauty of the enterprise was that the trip would have been profitable without passengers: northbound, the boot was full of letters for Virginia City forwarded from Utah at one dollar each, and, southbound, letters for home carried to Utah at the same price. Until the government officially recognized that there was a town north of Salt Lake City where no town had been before, and until it appointed a postmaster to the place, a process that took until late in 1864, all postal service into Virginia City was handled as a private business by the stagecoach lines.

Ben Holladay of the famous Overland Stage Line noticed the profit-making possibilities of coaches running into Montana Territory at about the same time that the Post Office Department became aware of the town not yet on its lists. His representative, "gentlemanly" Nat Stein, appeared in Virginia City in May of '64 with the dismaying news (to local coach companies) that he had been three weeks on the road from Salt Lake City establishing stage stations along the way for the projected Montana services of the famous Missouri to California line. Holladay's coaches started running July 1st, and, bad as they were by all accounts, soon grabbed most of the business from the even more decrepit rolling stock of the local lines, as well as the just-established mail contract. By November, Oliver & Company's coaches had quit running for the winter, and Oliver had gone east (presumably by Holladay's Overland) to buy new coaches.

The following May, Oliver was back in the coaching business again, running his new coaches in daily service to Helena, carrying passengers for fifteen dollars (twenty-five dollars round trip), letters for twenty-five cents, and express (trunks five dollars, suitcases two dollars).[2] Then the Post Office Department heard about Helena and awarded him the mail contract, and the newspaper gave him a slap on the back when one of his rigs reeled off a trip at an average nine miles an hour, making it to Virginia City in about fourteen hours instead of the usual eighteen. Things were looking up. What with the mail contract subsidizing him, a few regular commuters like Colonel Sanders climbing aboard every week or so, the Boss Chinese, Ping Chong, and his lady riding to oversee Helena work gangs, even Featherlegs, an Indian, riding the white man's contraption, Oliver was able to get through the winter—though bad weather and slow traveling forced him to raise his passenger rates until the one-way fare equaled the old twenty-five-dollar round-trip fare, and to double his express rates as well.

Then in June he read the same old disheartening news: Ben Holladay had just rolled in six "splendid coaches" for an opposition line to Helena. Holladay's first coach carried the curtain-bulging load of fourteen plus express; in two months, Oliver had been run from the road and had put his coaches on feeder lines out of Helena, the first of a long line of Montana businessmen to be run off by foreign monopoly.

Now Ben Holladay was stagecoaching as far as Montana Territory was concerned. His coaches could get to Atchison in twenty days. Hundreds of men, including those who had ridden with him once and should have known better, paid him the $350 he asked for the trip,[3] and cursed him for their mistake. Granville Stuart, remembering a particularly rough trip, on one leg of which six passengers, driver, and luggage were loaded into a hack with no seats, forcing the passengers to

"lock hands and hang across the load saddle bag fashion," wrote, "If the earnestness and deep sincerity with which the maledictions are uttered could insure their taking effect, I would not stand in Ben Holladay's shoes for *two* mail contracts." [4] Another frequent traveler about the West, Captain Fiske, who led three expeditions from Minnesota to Montana, also had the misfortune to take a Holladay coach home following one of his expeditions, and condemned the facilities of the Overland Company as the worst he had ever experienced.

There was of course no rebate of fare to passengers who had paid for first-class travel and had to put up with any conveyance Holladay chose to thrust upon them. Nor did Holladay ever rebate any fare to the passengers who were fool enough to pay out good money to ride the coach from Salt Lake City to Virginia City in the spring, and who found that they also had to push, or at least get out in the boggiest part of the road and wade through gumbo so that the vehicle could move. These mud-bedaubed trips were so common they became a wry joke among the b'hoys, who called them "walking to Virginia City on the coach." They were delighted when one disgruntled fellow, tired of paying for the privilege of walking, put his baggage on the coach in Corinne one muddy springtime and hiked out for Montana, arriving in Virginia City ten days later, where he had to wait for his baggage to catch up with him, having passed "the mud wagon and passengers that started from Corinne on the same day with him" at Pleasant Valley, Idaho.[5]

There were other things wrong with the services of the famous company on the Montana branch of its line. Monopoly made them careless and accidents became frequent on the mountain routes, sometimes the fault of drivers trying to keep up with overfast schedules on poor mountain roads, sometimes the result of horses fresh from the oat box being unskillfully driven by a driver fresh from the Senate Saloon. Because of the

accidents, the Holladay company drew an editorial blast from the *Post*, which accused it of laxness in regard to the safety of its passengers and of "the want of order and system in the conduct and management of the Overland line of coaches. . . ." [6]

Stagecoaching in and out of Virginia City improved somewhat after Holladay sold out to the Wells Fargo Company in 1866; at least, the horses and coaches were said to be of the finest, and the meals were complimented as well. Even so, there were many complaints about the prices charged for meals and lodging. The complaining seems justified, for dinners sold at $1.50 to $2.50 each, and the charge for sleeping on the floor of the stage station was two dollars a night.[7] (Passengers on any line had always fretted about the food or the prices. Oliver & Company had once put such a mess on the table in front of Colonel Sanders that he had left it in disgust. When the station agent asked him if "them eggs wasn't hard enough?" the Colonel barked, "The whole damn meal is hard enough," as he slammed the door behind him and went back to the coach unfed.) Meals and sleeping accommodations could cost $200 above the ticket price on a twenty-day trip from Missouri.

Another cost was that of excess baggage. The Wells Fargo Company generously allowed for this major voyage, a magnificent twenty-five pounds of baggage free, but charged sixty cents per pound of excess weight. Thus a well-dressed lady such as Mrs. Tuttle, the Bishop's wife, paid an extra $195 fee for her necessary baggage.[8]

One hardship that was not the fault of any company was that of wintertime stagecoaching in Montana Territory—there was no way to put a stove in the cramped coach or to keep the road from drifting over. Accounts of wintertime trips read like reports of Arctic survival expeditions. Sometimes the eighteen hours to Helena stretched into three grueling days, during which all hands labored to save themselves from freeze-

ing, while the coach inched forward behind horses so winded they collapsed on their haunches, like dogs, to blow. On one such trip, the lead horses, bewildered by the storm, plunged off the road, burying coach, passengers, and themselves deep in a snowdrift. The b'hoys, after burrowing out, had to sink a shaft to extricate the coach and shovel a road to free the horses. On another snowy trip, finding the coach an impossible drag on the horses, the b'hoys abandoned it, boarded mail sacks towed behind the teams, and delivered themselves postage-free into Virginia City.

Such ingenious efforts were born of necessity, for death could come quickly in a coach marooned in forty-below weather, even though the passengers dressed like men donning their entire wardrobe to escape a hotel bill. Colonel McClure pulling out of town in January during a "cold snap" (twenty-six degrees below zero), was wearing "double woolen underclothing, a heavy winter suit, a blanket overcoat, a pair of heavy California blankets fully half an inch thick and large enough to envelop the whole body, an immense buffalo robe, double woolen socks, and buffalo boots, all carefully wrapped in gunny-sack, for the feet." [9] Eight similarly dressed men crammed themselves into the little mountain coach, while a tenth man, a poor miner with no Arctic gear, was plopped into the middle of them, insulated from the outside cold like the innermost fish in a sardine can.

The driver, sitting on the box outside, also wore layers of insulation, with the addition of a full suit of buckskin underwear over his woolen long johns. Unfortunately, he could not adequately protect his driving hand from the cold, for he could not encumber the fingers that held the lines. On this hand he wore a silk glove next to the skin, covered by a buckskin glove, protection so slim that following any bad weather stagedrivers were to be seen loafing about stations, nursing frost-bitten hands.

A winter trip to Salt Lake City involved a sled ride over Monida Pass, coaches meeting the sleds on either side of the mountains. This high road was of packed snow marked off from the loose drifts around it by a border of willow poles stuck upright along the road edge. But in this all-white world where ground blizzards and sky blended in a white void, willow sticks were easily missed, and the sled was upside down at the side of the road three or four times a day, passengers strewn across the snow, laughing. In those hardier days a public carrier could spill his patrons about and never incur a lawsuit, not even if he broke the precious brandy bottles which they passed around between upsets, lying about the sled bottom, telling yarns as if they were partying on a hayride.

While sledding over the pass, they traveled only during the daylight hours, stopping each night at a crude way-station, where they continued the day's festivity, nipping at brandy and singing around the stove before rolling up in all their layers of clothing and blankets to sleep on the cold floor. The b'hoy who had to go to Salt Lake in January sometimes wore the same clothes and nursed the same cold feet for eleven days before he entered the warmth of Mormon hotels (even though the mail contract called for weekly coach trips December through March).

Montana winters were meant for sitting in stove-warmth reading through a supply of books, not for traveling. Most of the b'hoys managed this kind of hibernation, squinting at nineteenth-century small print until eyestrain set in, reading books from the single public institution they willingly supported, the library, sating themselves with narrative until in May the paper could report, "The books of the city library are not sought after much. After people have read through an eight months' winter they know enough."

But rumors of a new gold strike, such as the one near Salmon, Idaho, were all that was needed to make a b'hoy give

up rocking-chair adventuring and board a coach for a bold, wintertime undertaking of his own. The midwinter trip to the new Salmon mines, which the b'hoys began offhandedly in coaches and sleds sent to the scene by A. J. Oliver, they found to be so cold and so dangerous it outdid any of the hair-raisers they had been reading. One of them wrote to the *Post* a Jules Verne-inspired idea for the trip:

> If there was a tube from Bannack to the new gold field through which passengers could be forced by steam in a minute, and one-half would lose their lives, it would not scare us as much, for every man would take his chance, one out of two, for a safe trip.[10]

Fifty-fifty odds would have looked good also to the b'hoys on several trips, but especially so to those aboard the coach which, driving at night through Port-Neuf canyon, on the way to Salt Lake City, ran into a thaw-water lake where the road should have been, and found themselves being floated through the darkness behind the swimming horses, a cruise lasting just as long as it took them to pull off their boots and make ready to swim for it before the horses pulled the dripping outfit ashore. Some other b'hoys may have wondered if they had even-up chances the day they rode a coach that rolled slowly along planks laid end to end across the thin ice of the Missouri River, a makeshift bridge which sank scarily as the coach moved over it.

Yet in spite of the risks and hardships, in spite of the cut-throat competition, John Allman saw opportunity in stage-coaching in Montana in the spring of 1866. Of course, he lived in Sacramento and didn't realize the number of coachmen who had had the same idea; consequently, he started for Montana from California in March with eight brand-new six-horse coaches, not knowing exactly what he was going to do with

them, but figuring he'd find a road to run 'em on someplace in the Territory. He found Virginia City with all the coach service she needed: there were coaches leaving for Helena and for Hot Springs every day, one for the Gallatin Valley once a week, and coaches for Salt Lake City leaving on Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. Allman spent the summer poking about Territorial roads for a good feeder route not already occupied by the ubiquitous Oliver & Company. Such was the need for coaches that by fall he had found the empty road he needed and was running a line from Hell Gate to Wallula on the Columbia River, using the coach-breaking Mullan Road, a 450-mile trail fit mostly for pack animals.[11]

Yet, on such an out-of-the-way route a company could make money, for the stagecoach in Montana was the only sure way of transporting mail and express, the first on government contract, the second at monopoly rates so high a Virginia City lady once paid eighteen dollars in express charges on five dollars worth of flowers shipped "from the east," an experience which made her think she could afford to have her plants come by special balloon thereafter. Such lucrative cargo made passenger-carrying of secondary interests and passenger-comfort of small concern to the stage companies; they stuffed them aboard as if they were a crate of chickens consigned to a way-station down the road a piece.

Ironically, only the well-to-do could afford to travel like livestock, but even they sometimes rebelled, and their vengeance was laconically noted in the *Post:* "The passengers on one of Oliver & Co.'s coaches which left this town on the 17th inst., had a break down, got mad, and burnt up the coach on Snake River." [12]

They were wreaking vengeance not only for the manhandling they had always received from the coach companies, but for the thousand and one other inconveniences wrought upon them, one of which was irregular mail delivery. Although the

coach was the fastest way in and out of the Territory, it was subject to as many delays as a woman dressing for a party, and had as many good excuses for tardiness. A fairly frequent one was that the horses were sick of an epizooty, leading the paper to complain, "We cannot reasonably expect more than two eastern mails per week from this until the stage-horses get through blowing their noses."

"The Mud, the beautiful Mud" was another excuse used frequently in the spring, while Virginia City waited in vain for the long-postponed call, "the coach is coming!"—and learned of the whereabouts of its mail from the newspaper:

> HOPE DEFERRED MAKETH THE HEART SICK.—To those nervous individuals who rush frantically to the door every time a wheelbarrow passes, expecting the mail coach, we administer the following telegraphic opiate. Peace! troubled spirits: PLEASANT VALLEY, Friday, 5 P.M.—Mr. Gillespie, Agent: We have come to a dead stand still here. Four stages between here and Snake river. Cannot even go on foot. One team swamped, stuck in mud. Can neither get them forward or back. W. H. TAYLOR, Sup't.[13]

The mail which arrived in town after such delays was often proof that the coach company's excuse was valid, for it reached the post office "a curiosity—frozen, torn, dirtied and mixed up in every conceivable form. After being thawed, it was distributed as nearly in accordance with the wishes of senders as the case permitted." [14] When four such mails arrived in town at once on four muddy coaches, the postmaster sorted the mail in the pandemonium of an office surrounded by b'hoys shouting and shoving their way toward his window, a crowd so large that a slowpoke had no alternative but to make a turnabout and walk on back to his claim at dusk to note in

his diary, ". . . could not get to the P.O. for the crowd."

Stagecoaches were too erratic to provide what Virginia City desperately wanted, fast communication with the East. What was really needed, the b'hoys said, was an electric telegraph.

As luck would have it, a man who knew building telegraph lines from post-hole digging to instrument installation lived right in town, John Creighton. He and his brother Edward had been the stringers of the first transcontinental telegraph wire. John had come to Alder Gulch in '63 and had done well mining and freighting. He was a storekeeper also, having built the stone "Creighton Block" building at the corner of Wallace and Van Buren Streets. A good friend of Colonel Sanders, he was, it will be remembered, the man whom Sanders relied upon to show up at Ives's trial with b'hoys picked to vote for conviction.

In the summer of '66 the Western Union Company decided the town was ripe for a telegraph line and contracted with Creighton to build it. He started setting poles from Salt Lake City in August; by the time he arrived back in Virginia City in September with fifteen wagonloads of wire "and other essential materials" to begin that end of the line, sixty miles of poles were already in place outside of Salt Lake City, twenty-seven other wagons full of wire, etc., had been parceled out along the route, and 250 miles of post holes had been dug. Creighton was an organizer.

On September 22nd the first pole was planted at the Virginia City end of the line and anticipation ran high in town. By October 27th the instrument had been installed in Creighton and Ohle's store, sending signals to the end of wire, and the paper prophesied completion in two weeks. On November 3rd the line was completed, and the "lightning gobbler," Mr. Hugh, was sitting in his office watching his batteries "as earnestly as De Souty scrutinized those of the first Atlantic Telegraph," and the whole town waited for the clicking to begin.

One week later, the *Post* ecstatically reported: " 'The telegraph works beautifully.' So says everybody, and our columns are filled with what is literally the news of the day, proves the truth of the remark." Telegrams could now be fired to and from New York at one dollar a word.[15]

Being at the end of wire was a godsend to the *Post,* for it became the only newspaper in the Territory with telegraphic service. Editor Blake claimed that he printed an average of 5000 words per week of the latest telegraphic news, and he charged Helena papers with stealing his property by reprinting these valuble dispatches from the *Post*'s printing of them. He implied that this news was costing the paper $5000 a week at the regular telegraphic rates—which must have been about $3000 per week more than the paper took in. This newspaper war of the telegraphic dispatches was halted the next fall when Creighton completed the line from Virginia City to Helena, building at his fastest rate, completing as many as twenty-seven miles of line in one day. The October day it was completed, the company allowed anyone who wished to send a free message between the two cities; afterward they paid $1.50 for the first ten words, plus ten cents a word for extra words.[16]

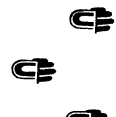
Disappointingly, a slender telegraph wire strung through the wilderness proved to be almost as unreliable as the stagecoach. The first mishap to it serious enough to be reported in the paper occurred in the spring of 1867, when spring floods washed out sections of the line. From then on the service became more erratic, until in the early '70's an editor complained that "the thing is broken so often it is barely admissable to mention it in a newspaper," while another one claimed that the best way to reach a person with a telegraphic message "is to fill up the blank and forward it per mail," and still a third, Tom Deyarmon of the *Madisonian,* hoped that it would be fixed by the time of the next Centennial anniversary (1876) and printed this account of its efficiency:

> An exciting race ended in the MADISONIAN office on Tuesday. It was between a daily newspaper and a telegram. The former left St. Louis on the 15th inst., and the latter was dispatched from Philadelphia on the 14th—receiving one day's start. It was nip and tuck to the finish, but the telegram came in 30 minutes ahead of the paper. Hurrah for lightning.[17]

Though the telegraph had proved pretty much of a fizzle for long-distance, frontier communication, the b'hoys had considerable fun with the invention, stringing up wires between each others' cabins, playing chess by Morse code in cabins separated by a hundred yards. The clicking keys caught on so they became a stampede, and "all the young men in town" joined the Virginia City Telegraph Association which met by wire every evening. Lovers too became infected by the mania and kept in contact by wire strung between their houses, tapping out sweet nothings after respectable courting hours had separated them, garbling the code so much that younger brothers had to be sent scurrying with notes to explain the misunderstanding.[18]

But the romance of coded communication faded when George Todd brought a "whispering telephone" to town one spring. Everybody had a listen and agreed "it beats telegraphing all to smithereens." Right away, the b'hoys wanted to be able to talk home on the new machine, blithely overlooking that fact that, as the *Madisonian* put it, "When they send us some telephonic music from the States the most appropriate air will be 'Thou art so near and yet so far.' "

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



SAINTS AND SINNERS: SALVATION'S ROUGH ROAD IN VIRGINIA CITY

THERE WAS no such thing as a quiet Sunday morning in Virginia City. Saturday night the miner was paid; Sunday morning those b'hoys who had stayed the night in town gulped shuddery eye-openers standing shoulder to shoulder at the bar with men who were about to start their regular Sunday battle with "Mr. Al K. Hall." By church time, roisterers crowded the streets, come to shake the dust out of their pokes into saloon gold scales which had teetered emptily all week—not into collection plates. They listened to preaching if there was nothing better to do, but Madison County b'hoys made up unreliable congregations: once, upon learning of the arrival of John Maguire, popular comedian, they stopped the sermon, ousted the preacher and brought on the actor.

Sunday was the day when storekeepers hired extra help, when hurdy-gurdy houses put on extra dancers, when auctioneers curried nags till they shone like brand-new and shouted themselves hoarse extolling the newly shod, never-been-ridden-faster-than-a-trot animals. Sunday was the day when a rare miner exchanged jeans for broadcloth, hired a room for a meetin', and shouted his sermon in competition with the auc-

tioneer's harangue just outside the window, making a confusing juxtaposition of messages:

"What shall I do to be saved?"
"Buy a first rate saddle horse."
"What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"
"Only thirty-seven dollars."

or, reversing the order:

"How much do I hear for this horse?"
"Seven baskets of fragments."
"Who wants him at forty dollars?"
"Dives in the torments of hell." [1]

Such a minister was Mr. A. M. Torbett, Baptist, who started a church of his own in the "court house" during the summer of 1864. His meetings were the only regularly held services in town, but J. Blanchard, making a kind of missionary survey of the Gulch, looked down his nose at the Baptist efforts, saying in a reporting letter that Torbett had "not come here expecting to preach but to speculate. He was once wealthy & would retrieve his fortunes. His room seats perhaps 60 to 80 people and is well filled, but there are at least two to three thousand men in the streets, every Sabbath, while he preaches, crying goods, buying, gambling, etc., etc." [2] However, as Mr. Blanchard should have known, Torbett had no church organization backing him and thus was obliged to support himself.

With Torbett's sermons not drawing well, Blanchard felt that the Congregationalist message might fall on welcome ears, and wrote home pleading for gospel-spreaders:

"There are, then, in the area of which this city is the center, some twenty to fifty thousand people, in a state of positive gospel destitution. . . . In short, no missionary field, home or foreign, seems to me more pressing or promising than this . . . Is there not a hale, healthy and eloquent minister, who is adventurous enough to spend a few years here, in founding

empires for Christ? Where too are the Societies to send religious reading? Send some, who will visit the miners in their cabins, and they will be well received. . . ." [3]

He was evidently seeing what he wanted to see, for a man with a handful of tracts would have been as popular in the miner's cabin as one with smallpox, for religion was played out in the gulch. The b'hoys worshiped Mammon and sneered at Sunday School teachings which didn't show color. They may have given lip service to their old beliefs, and they may have thrown an occasional nugget churchward, but so few of them poked their noses inside the door of a church that most congregations resembled family prayer meetings.

The Roman Catholics made one of the earliest attempts to bring the Word to the b'hoys, holding what was probably the first church service in Virginia City, the mass said to celebrate the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 1863. The service was held in the unfinished cabin of Peter Ronan, with Father Joseph Giorda, J. J., from the mission at Fort Shaw on the Sun River officiating. The later Mrs. Ronan, at that time little Mollie Sheehan, attended the service and remembered especially the tinkling sound of gold dust as it poured into tin cups which were passed from man to man for the offering. So innocent was Father Giorda of the value of the poke which the b'hoys had filled for the church, that, upon leaving, he was embarrassed to say he couldn't meet his forty-dollar livery bill for two days' board for his horse, and was astounded when he learned he was carrying a nice fortune under his cassock.[4]

Services were more frequent after this lesson in mining-camp economics, various fathers holding masses, sometimes at the home of John Mulqueen, sometimes in his store, sometimes in Fenian Hall in Nevada City, until the old theater building on upper Jackson Street was purchased for a church.

But churches and the godly arrived too late in town to change the topsy-turvy way in which the b'hoys regarded

things, too late to alter the strange pattern of living which had come about through "the possession of vast sums of money by uneducated and unprincipled people," and which had been built on a philosophy of "If you're so danged smart why ain't you rich?" Brains, education, principles meant little here where the mark of success was to have a little luck: where a man's past life was of little account, if he didn't have the spondulix to back up his brag; where society was here today and gone with the gold; where the "turbulent activity, the constant excitement, and the perpetual temptations to which the dweller in a mining camp is subject" made it difficult to concentrate on the eternal. A poverty-stricken parson had no convincing arguments with which to convert a happy Missourian whose claim could have supported a dozen such churches as his, who for the first time in his life had more than chaw money, and whose poke full of gold made him a man of consequence in town.

The b'hoys gave the Lord their pin money, putting up the $2000 necessary to build the first church in town, the Methodist, a log building at the corner of Jackson and Cover Streets, by contributing $1000 when the building was started and filling the passed hat with another $1000 in thirty minutes on the day of its dedication, November 6, 1864. Yet not more than a hundred of them had joined the congregation by the following March, leaving the Reverend Hough, its pastor, still dependent on the $1000 per year contributed to his salary by the Missionary Fund and trying to make ends meet on the pittance provided by the town for his support, perhaps another $1000.[5]

Yet Parson Hough was proud of the fact that by March of 1865 the new church was found to be too small, and that "hundreds went away every Sunday evening" because they could not be accommodated. Good as this may have been, a congregation of one hundred left thousands of men outside the fold who attended no regular service and who were so

unpersistent in storming the church doors of a Sunday night, that, in the end, only a twenty-foot lengthening of the tiny church was necessary to seat the overflow.

Perhaps the Reverend Hough had what he considered to be a large congregation because his services were held at night, thereby not competing with the horse races and all the other hoopla of a big Sunday in Virginia City: by evening, sinners had enough on their consciences to warrant pew sitting, and deacons were able to combine nighttime Sabbath church duties with daytime Sabbath storekeeping. Sunday closing of business houses was pleaded for by the *Post* every now and then, and one Sunday—January 7, 1866—several stores did keep their doors locked, but it was not for another year that it became somewhat of a regular practice, and then only because Sunday business was played out, the town having dwindled to 1500 population (the *Post* said 5000 in the area).[6] Sunday closing was then of no benefit to Mr. Hough, for his congregation had also diminished. Only twenty-five of his faithful hundred remained in town by April, 1866, and he was forced to follow the stampeding b'hoys to Helena. An unlooked-for development, this, for it had been held by the churchmen that a decline would send off the gamblers to camps with easier pickings, leaving the godly supreme.

When the Reverend Hough decamped, the town was left with hardly a pulpit to preach from. Soap-bubble dreams of two years ago had been bursting in the town's face ever since the strike in Last Chance; when Mr. Hough left, the b'hoys in Virginia City knew that a very large bubble had burst, for a town without a church is no town at all, least of all a City. (Summit had the only preacher in the gulch, the Reverend Hugh Duncan.)

They blew new bubbles to attract emigrants by making the town a trade center, by opening branch businesses in Helena, by making the most of their position as capital of the

Territory. A very considerable bubble was added to their pipe when the news came that the Episcopal Church was sending a Bishop to the Territory, and that his headquarters would be in Virginia City. Even as eastern immigrants, eastern shippers, eastern speculators were still thinking of Virginia City as the get-rich-quick town of the Rockies, unaware of the impact of the new diggings on the town, so the church had chosen the much-publicized place as seat of their new diocese. The town was living on the impetus given it by its early excitement, even though the gulch was described that same spring as "deserted and still but speaking with voices louder than ever could be made by the miners were they there." [7]

The services held by the Bishop stirred the b'hoys to religious life again—briefly. At first it was a diversion, a fad to turn out of a Sunday morning to hear the new man, the Bishop, preach, but the enthusiasm was short-lived. On April 29th, 1868 the Bishop wrote: "I have just come home from service. We had full services and all, but without Holy Communion. I preached the sermon that I wrote yesterday and the day before. Five men and five women were present." His disappointment was keen, for he remembered it years later, reminiscing about his congregation: "I knew the excitement of preaching to hundreds massed. I knew the trial, when novelty and enthusiasm were gone, of preaching to ten or twelve." [8]

He was not an easy man for the b'hoys to cotton to, for he disapproved of their loose life. Everyone swore, Sunday School lads and their fathers alike; everyone danced and played cards; if the Bishop suggested that it was wrong to do so, he was met with looks of mingled pity and amusement. Their laxness so galled him that he later wrote: "Caution, begot of knowledge, so ruled that in eight months of uninterrupted work in Virginia City I did not find one single person to be confirmed." [9] The b'hoys, uncomfortable under his disapproval, stayed away from him. He was lonely and friendless throughout the winter,

his wife left behind, his study and residence a rough cabin, his best companion his cat, and practically his only caller an old German wood chopper. For this he had refused St. Peter's Church in Albany, New York.

But swearing and cardplaying and dancing were not the Bishop's main concern; it was use of alcohol. In a town where every occasion was an excuse to take a smile, there were few places the cleric could go without smelling tainted breath. Callers in his cabin were similarly redolent on New Year's Day: ". . . when all called most kindly at my cabin, it would have been irresistibly funny had it not been inexpressibly sad, to see the anxious efforts made to keep form and eyes steady and tongues straight." [10]

It was hard for the Bishop to face the fact that he was unable to save his congregation from the demon rum. Alcohol had come to be a necessity to the b'hoys. It gave a false-front permanence to the temporary relationships of the mining camp: it brought the b'hoys together with all the false warmth of today's cocktail party, substituting a-glow-on for the warmth of friendships left behind, making an old buddy out of a chance drinking partner. It helped to blunt the edge of despair when speculations went awry, to make preposterous schemes seem possible until hangover came.

It was almost impossible to stay out of saloons, for they were clubhouse, news center, and business exchange all in one. Even those came through the swinging doors who "at home would as soon have been caught stealing chickens from a neighbor's hen-roost as to have been caught in such a place." Here they learned to prospect, began to savvy the language and the customs of the camp, heard of a good speculation, or hired out for their first job.

As a result, drunkenness was endemic in Virginia City, and the Bishop had no antitoxin to stay it. In his little congregation, one of his vestrymen was an alcoholic, and two other

men were also desperate drinkers, one of whom "grew so mad from drink his wife fled from him in terror. . . . I stayed with him in his delirium saving him from self destruction." But this palliative was no good, for the Bishop did not understand the nature of the disease; the best he could get himself to do was to treat the sick "with loving forbearance toward wicked people" —which only aggravated the disease.

There was very little about the town of which the Bishop could approve. The b'hoys gambled on anything, anywhere, anytime; when nothing better offered, they played "fly-lu" while standing at the bar, laying bets as to which lump of sugar a fly would land on first.

Backsliding gamblers further undermined the Bishop's church, for gambling came naturally to a town built on chance taking. There were big gaming houses, "The Mammoth" and "Burch, Clark & Co." on Jackson Street where fortunes were won and lost, though the gambling within their walls couldn't compare to the odds the b'hoys had already tossed against on their claims. In these rude casinos they could risk their whole pile in games dealt by "beautiful, nice young ladies, playing any games *except* three card monte," strap game, thimble rig game, patent safe game, black and red game (commonly known as the "tendice game"), any dice game, and two card box at faro—they having all been outlawed by the first legislature. Loaded dice were also legislated against (although there were to be no dice games), as well as marked and waxed cards. In spite of the legislation, tendice game was played so much the *Post* was forced to print a warning to greenhorns to beware of it, pointing out that though ten dice were thrown, the game was rigged so that only the highest and lowest numbers could win, and the chance of throwing under twenty or over fifty were about one in a million.

But the b'hoys of the Nightherd needed no such organized games in order to wager. Playing the horses was a favor-

ite method of gambling, though the nearest flat space large enough for a decent race was three miles uphill, at the top of the ridge between the Madison and Stinkingwater Valleys (the same ridge which the Fairweather party had come over). Here, every Sunday, Monte—owner of the livery stable (hearses available on short notice)—promoted races over a 600-yard course, starting at four P.M., for purses as high as $250 a side, finest of drinks available in the liquor tent.

When all the horses had run against each other, and even sucker money stayed in a tenderfoot's pocket, the b'hoys went in for Sunday foot races, both running and walking, the racers themselves sometimes backing their brag with a couple of hundred dollars. W. F. Gernhart picked up $100 one Sunday afternoon in this way, walking to Eight Mile House on the road to Bannack in fifty-one minutes. When these contests petered out, Sim Grim dreamed up the strange contests which pitted man against horse, fifty yards to a perpendicular pole and back. The man usually won, for the horse was slow in turning. This racing of man against beast culminated in the great race of 1867 between man and mule over a four-mile course from Junction to Virginia City—the mule being handicapped one-half mile. Excitement over the race brought out more eager money than any other event recalled. The odds were upset when the man won, though bleeding at nose and mouth and completely collapsing at the finish line.

There were lots of other Sunday contests well worth a bet: some days jig dancers cut a dido to decide who was the champion of the Territory—or, as in one case, to win the hand of a widow. Blacksmiths condescended to heat up their forges other Sundays to contest boastful men who had dared them to combat in public print:

> I hereby challenge Mr. James P. Welsh for to do the best piece of forging on any kind of machinery that Mr.

> Welsh may see fit for to name. Also that I will make and sett any number of Horse Shoes that he may name better than he can, for all the money I can raise. As I am not over flush I will say $200.00 at least, and as much more as I can get. The work is to be left to three disinterested Master Blacksmiths of this city or any where in this Territory, and I will be governed by their decision. Man and money ready at any time that Mr. Welsh may see fit.
>
> WILLIAM BLAY[11]

Sunday was also the day when dance halls did their best business. They were of no concern to Bishop Tuttle, for they had disappeared from Virginia City a year before he had arrived. If he had come sooner, he could have joined in the fight against them, though the campaign to close them was made not because they were immoral, but because a few Sundays in one could leave a b'hoy broke and on the relief rolls for the winter.

During the heyday of the hurdy-gurdy, the Bishop could have objected to them because they sold drinks, but not because they were fronts for prostitution, for there was no need to sell anything but innocuous dances in those halls of '64 and '65. A girl could make plenty of money at this work alone. In fact, an occasional married woman in desperate need supported her family by becoming a dancer in a hurdy-gurdy, and did so without being considered lost because of her occupation. If it so happened that one of the girls spent the remaining hours of the night in bed with one of her dancing partners, it was a free-lance proposition, not one that had been pandered by her boss. Some of the girls may have been whores when they had arrived in town, but after hours of being swung about by burly miners they wanted to go to bed alone to sleep, having found "fifty sets of quadrilles and four waltzes, two of them for the love of the thing, is very hard work."

The charge for a dance with one of the girls was one dollar,

of which she took half, making her earnings for the night, if she danced every dance, twenty-six dollars. The prettiest girls danced oftenest and had the most income. The homeliest danced least and perhaps needed the occasional wages of sin to complement their income. A beautiful girl collected thousands of dollars in gold as gifts from admirers, and was sometimes bedecked in clothes and jewelry worth several hundred dollars. She earned more in a week than an equally well-favored girl in the East could earn in two years.[12]

This waste of the b'hoys' money became less popular with the businessmen as the town became poorer, leading the *Post* to attack the institutions as early as January of '65, admonishing the spendthrifts that "With the hardest part of a mountain winter before them, our own citizens would do well to lay up a store of something more tangible than pirouettes, more nutritious than the memory of Varsoviennes and more profitable than smiles and tickets per agreement." [13] Virginia City was following the lead of Summit, where a public meeting had appointed a committee to call on hurdy-gurdy operators and tell them to quit.

In Virginia City the dance-hall owners continued operations, though dance halls declined in popularity as the town waned. To attract business they began to hire in 1866, "women of questionable—or rather unquestionable—reputation."

This gave the *Post* an excuse. It launched an all-out attack on the two remaining places, aiming editorial barbs at them, and printing letters to the editor against them:

> Why don't you pitch into that infernal nuisance on Jackson street, called by some a dance house . . . nearly every night my rest is broken by the shouts of drunken prostitutes and their partners . . . Fights are always occurring and the dancers utter hour after hour the most profane and obscene remarks. Many fools throw away

their money here, and we shall be obliged to support them the coming winter . . .[14]

One of the two houses was driven out of business by these attacks; the other stayed alive until December snows closed the mines. When it folded, the *Post* printed a two line obituary: "IMPROVING.—There is no 'hurdy-gurdy' house in this city. This is a remarkable fact in its history." [15] An ex-resident of the place commented, more pithily, that "the prostitutes, pimps and gamblers are all leaving Virginia and the place is going straight to the d—l." [16]

But the saloons remained. In them the b'hoys shot and knifed each other, gouged out eyes, and bit off ears and lips in their brawling. Fighting was a seasonal thing with the b'hoys. They were able to drink together during the summer months when they were working, but during the winter, the same gut-burning whisky that had loosened their tongues in sudden friendships in July turned to fight-water in December, for idleness brought on cabin fever and loosened tempers in even quicker enmities. There were a couple of serious saloon bloodlettings a month during the winter of '65-'66, but after the April thaw, they got along so well together that only one shooting occurred from then till they started pulling triggers again the following December.

The saloon was the enemy of the godly; they felt that alcohol was the cause of all the town's misfortunes, including the waste of the capital which it produced. They were right. The b'hoys shoved a lot of dust across the bar, which they sorely needed for mining; a need which only occasionally drove them to abstinence: the six men who formed "The Mill Creek Temperance and Furnace Association" swore off from April 1 to July 4 in order to pool the amount usually spent on liquor for the purchase of a reduction furnace. They estimated that the amount the six of them would put by would be $100 to $125 a

week—at twenty-five cents a drink![17] (Two-bits was the standard price for a shot except in 1865 when the saloonkeepers doubled the price, until a boycott by the b'hoys forced them to knuckle under.)

Such continual imbibing made the b'hoys immune to all but huge amounts of alcohol. One editor swore that men were observed in town who could down seventeen tumblers of whisky a day and show no ill effects. Another newspaper story contended that at a blowout given for "the chosen leaders of the Virginia free lunchers and performers on improvised instruments," a select group of thirty, meeting for an hour and a half in Mannheim's brewery, consumed "fifty-two gallons of lager beer, six hundred and sixty drinks of whisky, two hundred cigars and fifteen oyster stews." As the editor figured it, this came out to "two drinks of beer and one drink of whisky every three minutes; a cigar every fifteen minutes" for each man, and "an oyster stew for the crowd every six minutes."[18]

Those who lacked this Gargantuan capacity joined the Bishop in abstinence, and pledged temperance to the Good Templars, a promise which one of them put into verse and hung from his last broken-necked bottle:

> My Owl charmer your neck i've broak,
> Which seems to be unginerous,
> But hang the luck its too much goak
> To give you always countenance;
> Besides you know, before this blow,
> My neck you've oft disginted,
> So farewell fun I will by—Gum
> Take one long snort—we're parted.[19]

Though the editor might print such a humorous pledge, he was no supporter of drys, for barkeeps used a lot of paragraph, advertising puffs, and breweries often rolled a free barrel of brew into the pressroom to help get the paper out (sometimes,

as on the Fourth of July, this was more hindrance than help, and the paper had to apologize for being late because all hands had been drunk—knowing the b'hoys would understand).

Sunday closing and churchgoing received little support from editors other than Dimsdale, either. They preferred to write funny little squibs to entertain the b'hoys, such as "Be a man and observe the Sabbath. Buy your whisky to-night, and don't go sneaking around the saloons to-morrow," or "if you can't pray yourself, attend the Wednesday Evening Prayer-Meeting, and good people will pray for you with all their might. Spend an hour with the pious." [20] Virginia City editors needed no such circulation boosters as muckraking campaigns against saloons.

Nor did any editor ever blast the sinfulness of the prostitutes in the houses at the end of Wallace Street, though one did get teary and moralize at the ministry when one of the girls died, writing: "Is it Christian-like for a minister to refuse to read a burial service and offer a prayer at the burial of a fallen woman? The doctrines of the New Testament do not teach this kind of spirit." [21] He was also critical of the Christian women in town, strangely horrified that a man had had to lay out this finally chaste body. Generally, editors sniggered about the "Cyprians" (as they loved to call them) and goings-on in the "demi-monde" (another favorite euphemism). Typically, when an assemblyman introduced a scandalous legislative bill to tax whorehouses, the editor printed the story under the headline, IF A BODY MEET A BAWDY. And when one of the girls sued one of the b'hoys to recover ninety-six dollars "for services rendered," the harlot's day in court was reviewed as a two-act stage entertainment—which it came close to being.

This levity in the face of rampant immorality convinced Bishop Tuttle that the b'hoys were among the damned, and he wrote: "Men were kind personally, generous in giving money, respectful and courteous; but I was appalled to discover day

by day how almost universally given up they were to vicious practices." And again, "Alas, the longer I live here, the worse, the more deeply bad, the more thoroughly soaked in irreligion, do I find the entire community to be." [22] The Bishop's opinion didn't worry the Protestant b'hoys; they celebrated Christmas and Easter by getting drunker than on Sundays, ignoring the religious rites of the days completely.

In direct contrast to their disregard was the mindfulness of the Jewish b'hoys to their religious days, times when they closed shop doors and remembered God. The heathen Chinese were also meticulous about honoring their gods, halting worldly concerns to practice their rites in the "josh house" which they built at the foot of Wallace Street, for which, an editor noted: "They will buy idols of the oldest style, and these heathens will then bow down to wood and stone. People who worship gold cannot see much sense in adoring cheap articles like these." [23]

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE CANVAS AND THE BOARDS: PRIZE FIGHTERS AND THESPIANS

> WANTED.—A man that saw the bull-fight. Also, a forty-foot pole, a two foot sponge and five gallons of chloroform—to catch a grizzly bear.
>
> *Montana Post* (1864)[1]

AS THE PARAGRAPH INDICATES, not many of the b'hoys wanted to admit they'd been fool enough to spend two dollars on the honest-to-goodness Mexican Bull Fight of October, 1864, a scheme for getting gold dust that had placering backed right out of the gulch. This novelty was staged by men in need of capital to start a livery business. Homegrown talent appeared: the Mexicans in town had seen bull fights; they were to give authenticity to the Mexican part of the affair. Oxen with mean-looking horns were unhitched from their traces for a day to masquerade as *toros*. It was assumed that bringing Mexican and bull together in the ring would produce the fight part of the shindig. Unfortunately, "When the bull got into a passion, the bull-fighter had cooled off, or mounted the fence for that purpose." The only *pases* made anywhere near the bull's horns that afternoon were by a

pack of dogs which were set on the poor animal to start some of the expected blood flowing. The b'hoys had been *sold* once more, whereas the ticket sellers had paid for their brand-new corral.

Because the b'hoys who piled up and down Wallace Street were restlessly searching for something to do, they were the delight of all promoters: they could be sold ducats for almost any kind of an exhibition that could be brought into the mountains, sold chances on everything from meerschaum pipes to real estate.

Actors came from New York theaters to exhibit their talents. Athletes, acrobats, minstrels, soothsayers, wizards, singers, contortionists, faith mediums, fortune tellers, and spiritualists all kept *Montana Post* job-printing presses busy turning out placards, heralds, and (most important) tickets. Traveling lecturers also regarded the little town as a rostrum surrounded by paid admissions.

One of the first showmen into town was the fellow who bobbed up Wallace Street on top of a dromedary, one of six which had carried him from California, shattering the placid routine of freighters and mule teams all the way. The six, supposedly remnants of those unsuccessfully imported by the Army for desert warfare in the Southwest, looked so out of place in the Rockies that Dimsdale proposed sending them as a pack train through Indian country to give the redskins the scare of their lives. The b'hoys bought lots of rides, but unfortunately the brief safaris about the streets undid the nerves of all the dray horses in town, fraying drivers' tempers. When a girl was hurt in a fall from one of the ungainly brutes, the owner was told to grease his boots and take his camels with him. After one of his animals was shot as an elk by a startled hunter, dromedaries and owner headed for the safer ranges of California.

Seven days' popularity was enjoyed by a strange pedestrian

sport known as plank-walking. "Yankee" Driggs, a sharp New England tinsmith, invented the brief-lived endurance contest just before Christmas of 1865. He sold tickets to his novelty, raising capital to start a tinshop by hiring the brand-new Stonewall Hall and there grimly pacing back and forth on an eighteen-foot plank raised eighteen inches from the floor, never halting, for an exhausting thirty-six hours. At the close of his marathon, which aroused tremendous interest, the Shebang Saloon, needing a diversion for the holiday season, backed an endurance contest between Driggs and C. W. Blunt for the plank-walking championship of Montana Territory. But ticket sales were light, and the men called it quits after topping Driggs's record by thirteen hours. Plank-walking was dead in Montana Territory, but by 1874 Driggs was mayor of the town.

Mail-order bilks also fleeced the b'hoys. Typical were the patent-medicine quacks who advertised sure cures for venereal disease, sent in plain wrappers, or offered advice on how to regain sexual potency after the "debilitating practices of youth." The meanest of these bunco-artists were the ones who, preying on the loneliness of the b'hoys, advertised themselves as lovely young Mormon girls anxious to leave Utah and be out of the reach of the "lecherous" Brigham Young.

Montana b'hoys rallied to rescue the damsels from the ogre. Letters posted to the Utah addresses brought back delicate answers. Further exchanges of missives produced sepia prints, slightly scented, depicting maidens even more luscious than the b'hoys had dreamed of. The smitten latter-day knights were all for donning sidearms for a joust with Latter-day Saints, but continued correspondence indicated all that need be done to rescue one of these lovelies, to have her combing her tresses in one's lonely cabin, was to ransom her by sending stage fare. Bereft of reason by the pretty faces dimpling at them from the pasteboard, the b'hoys dispatched the

paltry money to Utah, and began meeting each coach from the south, eager to hand down the expected bevy of eloping beauties.

When a fortnight later no coach had disgorged either beauties or letters, one of the gallants made the quest to Salt Lake City, a knight-errant with carpetbag, a siege plan in his mind. Once in the City of Saints, he sought out the castle of the photographer from whose studio the prints had come and showed the chemical-stained wizard within his only keepsake, the photograph. Alas! the picture was one of numerous anonymous stage beauties whose likeness could be purchased by the gross, and no amount of sorcery or pilgrimage could discover the evil giants who had robbed them so.

The attractions that outdrew all others were the boxing matches. An ordinary fight once jammed so many b'hoys into town to see the event as to block the streets. Just the announcement of a forthcoming "Championship" bout was enough to stir them into a round of unheralded, impromptu knockdown discussions of who was going to be the coming Champion. After the fight had passed, the same form of debate was carried on in defense of the winner, the loser, the boxing style, the referee, the decision, or whether a rematch would reverse the result. A good fight could even draw mourners away from that *rara avis* of the town's diversions, a first-class funeral. So the sheriff discovered when he noticed the male portion of the crowd dwindling and followed the defalcators over Boot Hill to the coulee beyond, where, sure enough, two Negroes were sparring. At the sheriff's untimely appearance, the two boxers took "leg-bail," while the "bottle holders" went scrambling after.

Their panic was caused because boxing had been banned in the Territory by act of the first legislature, making it unlawful for two or more persons to fight by agreement "to the

terror of the citizens of this Territory." (No matter that fisticuffs, a favorite pastime with the b'hoys, seemed unlikely to scare them much.) A later Assembly legalized boxing, if the fighters wore gloves; boxers observed the letter of the law scrupulously, always donning skin-tight buckskin gloves for each affray, after first soaking their hands in chemicals for weeks beforehand to toughen the skin.

The rulings of the lawmakers resulted in a strange ambivalence on the part of the sheriff toward boxing. Some fights were the biggest thing in town, while others were hush-hush affairs (well-advertised) held in out-of-the-way coulees. One suspects that the sheriff frowned on any pugilism to which he had not loaned his bribed consent.

Tickets to fights outsold all other kinds of pasteboards, but all was not peaches and cream for promoters. The b'hoys backed favorites with every ounce they had, and backed up their bets with brawn if they suspected skulduggery. The New Year's Day fight at Con Orem's saloon-legislative hall was kept from developing into a riot by Johnny-on-the-Spot X. Beidler, who jumped into the ring at the first sign of rumpus, both Navies drawn, threatening to shoot the first miner who attempted to stop the fight. X. was wise to the tricks of bad losers who, unhappy at the way the fight was going, tried to create a free-for-all which would halt the ring-fighting completely and cancel all bets. Fearful of what soreheads might do to hedge a bet, promoters sometimes advertised, "No weapons of any kind are allowed around or outside of the enclosure."

Con Orem was certainly Champion of the Territory, and claimed to be Champion Middleweight of the United States. Before coming to Montana, he had fought professionally five times, winning twice, taking forfeit money once, getting a draw decision against Patsy Marley, and having the crowd break up the fight before a decision. In Montana he fought six times, winning three, getting a draw once, losing twice—one

loss of which may have been a dive on his part. This ring record is not impressive, his fame being built upon his two fights with Hugh O'Neil, a brawny, six-foot, 190-pound freighter. Con stood five feet six and a half inches and weighed only 138 pounds. On January 2, 1865, these two men battled 185 rounds to a draw, one of the longest fights in ring history. In a later fight, in 1866, Con defeated his burly antagonist by decision, on a foul.

Con was one of the most popular men in town when he first arrived. He paid attention to business and swore he would fight no more. He made friends with everyone, and once was serenaded by the City Brass Band, an honor reserved for bigwigs. But three years later Con was in adversity, possibly a pauper, his popularity gone. Strangely enough, his loss of popularity began with his good showing in the first fight with O'Neil.

The big freighter was proud of his ability as a brawler. But for him there would have been no fight; his challenge to any fighter in Virgiania City appeared in the *Post* on October 8, 1864. Up until this time, Orem had served in the local ring only as a second or official. Now he accepted O'Neil's challenge in language more becoming to his friend Dimsdale than a boxer.

> EDITOR POST:—In answer to Hugh O'Neil's challenge in your columns, I have only to say that it was not my intention to seek further honors in the P. R. If such had been my desire, I would have gone East—but if O'Neil must have a fight, and means business, although he is some fifty pounds heavier than I am, and would have to come down that much, according to the rules of the ring; yet if he will call upon me, I will make two matches with him, catch weights. One, a glove fight for $500 a side, and a ring fight for $1,000 a side, open for $5,000. Money ready at any moment. If this offer is not accepted within a

fortnight, I will not receive or accept any further challenge, as it is my wish to follow my business undisturbed, and to live as a private citizen. Yours, & c.

JOHN C. OREM[2]

In spite of Con's blushing protests, and because of his later fights, one suspects that he had been waiting for just this sort of a big-money contest, that his main objection to a ring career in Virginia City heretofore had been the risk of cauliflower ears for a niggardly $100.

Con's proposal for a ring fight at $1000 a side was acceptable to Hugh, and it was decided to fight February 5, 1865, which date was later amended to January 1, 1865, and then at Dimsdale's request changed to January 2 because New Year's Day fell on Sunday—a rather remarkable concession, considering the usual Sunday activities.

The fight was promoted in the professional style of the day, sparring matches being held in the weeks before the fight to show off the style of the boxers. Also, an attempt was made to make this look like a grudge fight between the forces of good, teetotaling Con, versus evil, whisky-drinking Hugh—an effective bit of ballyhoo which is still heard in sermons today. Attendance was expected to be so great that A. J. Nelson erected a sawed-log building, eighty by twenty-eight feet, especially for the occasion. It stood behind his Wallace Street saloon, near to Kiskadden's store, and contained a snug bar and a gallery for ladies. It became known as Leviathon Hall. Tickets went on sale at ten dollars for reserved seats and five dollars for the pit.

The last bit of promotion, a sparring match, was held the night before the fight. It was a benefit gotten up for Hugh O'Neil by all his Irish friends. He sparred with Orem, Joe Riley, and Joe Bean for the purpose of "giving the public an opportunity of judging the condition of the men prior to the

great contest." (Sparring contests on Sunday at one dollar a head were evidently not sacrilegious.) Later Hugh claimed he hurt his hand during this evening.

The next day Leviathon Hall was packed an hour before ring time, but not entirely with paying spectators, for "the fall of a shed introduced some three or four hundred ticketless spectators, and so crowded the hall" (a preview of what was to happen at Montana's other famous championship fight, the Dempsey-Gibbons affair at Shelby a half century later). De Waugh's Band was on hand to furnish music; a sprinkling of women took advantage of the ladies' gallery.

Promptly at 1:15 P.M., O'Neil climbed into the ring, dressed in the green of Ireland, with the Irish harp and his name embroidered thereon. Then Con entered the ring, decorated in a black outfit with "a single star on a black ground with a red border. Round his waist were girded the stars and stripes with the eagle and bearing the motto 'may the best man win.' " J. A. Nelson, owner of the hall, was referee and George Hynson, proprietor of the new Gem Saloon, was timekeeper. The fight began at 1:40 after the rules of the London prize ring had been read from the gallery. The betting was altogether in Hugh's favor.

Three hours and ten minutes later the fight was called a draw, the men having gone 185 rounds in that time, a round then being either a minute long or lasting until one man was off his feet, at least down on one knee. This rule seems to have been the only one obeyed by O'Neil, who was a man of little boxing science, and it saved Orem, who deliberately fell to his knees thirty-six times to end the round and O'Neil's attack.

These tactics infuriated O'Neil and his big Irish friends in the crowd. Unable to keep the fast little Orem in his reach for a full minute, he took to falling on Orem whenever the latter slipped down, dropping his full 190 pounds on him, and then hitting him when they were down. Several times he lifted Con

by the neck and threw him down, to crys of "foul, fair, go on, etc."

In spite of his slippery tactics, Con was knocked flat in at least fifty rounds. Even so he was in good enough shape after fighting a hundred rounds to clown a bit, falling backward, arms folded and laughing up at the hulk of O'Neil, mockingly shaking his fist. Con was able to knock Hugh down eighteen times, more often toward the end of the fight, as his tactics of wearing the bigger man down started to succeed.

Con scientifically worked on Hugh's eyes, the most vulnerable part of the larger man, and succeeded in almost blinding him by the end of the fight. In the 129th round Con was forcing the fight, but in the 167th O'Neil slugged him behind the ear after the round was over. Orem was dazed from then on, being knocked down in the 169th round while too confused to guard himself.

The referee, Nelson, stopped the fight to avoid a fatality, both men being "frightfully punished about the head and body." He vowed that it was the best fight he had ever witnessed. Dimsdale, who covered the fight for the *Post,* noted that in ten minutes more the timekeeper would have needed a candle and Hugh "an extra pair of eyes." O'Neil went home in a wagon, too blinded to walk; Con's seconds forced him to be carried, although he wanted to walk.[3]

The fight being called, all bets were off, but the arguments went on forever. The distant Salt Lake *Vedette* entered the dispute, criticizing the handling of the fight, forcing Dimsdale to print a rebuttal which pointed out the many fouls committed by O'Neil, through ignorance, commenting, "Hugh is as brave as a lion, and would not break the rules, we think, if he knew it."[4]

Each man received $425, his share of the gross receipts after expenses, plus an equal share of the "ring money"—the gold dust from the pokes tossed into the ring. Since this was

far less than either had fairly expected to make, friends of each arranged benefits for them. Hugh's was a sparring match at Leviathon Hall; Con appeared at the theater in the role of "Stitch" in an afterpiece entitled *The Frisky Cobbler.*

Con had proved himself game as they come, but had lost the patronage of the b'hoys, who liked slugfests, not science. His saloon closed in April and he hied himself to the newer fields of Helena. Dimsdale remained staunchly devoted, and hoped he would quit the ring, saying, ". . . a man of Orem's quiet and temperate habits and demeanor is surely able to make money and command respect in other ways than by the knuckle . . . besides . . . he has done enough."[5]

If Con had heeded Dimsdale's wishes, he would have been better off. Instead, he came back to the ring as a source of easy money whenever one of his saloons folded, until in 1867 his fight with Billy Dwyer was branded by the b'hoys as "a mere swindle to get a winter's grub." Within a year he was gone from town. Three years later his vacant Melodeon was declared a public nuisance, sold for taxes, and razed. The only trace of the most publicized man in the Territory vanished along with him.

But boxing matches remained the favorite entertainment of the b'hoys in spite of Con's defections. It was something that induced empathy, for it was their favorite exercise as well: many of them considered themselves expert pugilists, and, on nights when the champions were exhibiting their sparring style, made up the remainder of the bill by clambering into the ring, bearded and booted, to take on all comers. Too, many noses empathically felt the blows that flattened and many fists remembered the smack of knuckle against jaw from last Sunday's row in the Shades Saloon. The only sure way of staying out of a fight was to follow the *Post*'s advice to keep quiet in one's own house, for once out of it a man was a mark for any wandering bully. Even Territorial Governor Smith, sitting

quietly talking to Captain LaBarge on a dock at Fort Benton, was forced to club down a man "determined to have a fight with someone" to avoid being stabbed.[6]

Some time during the first year following the gold strike, an actor at liberty arrived in town carrying a few pirated play scripts at the bottom of a trunk filled with what looked like, to an eye not of *the profession,* cast-off clothes, beads for Indian giving, children's tin swords with dented scabbards, and mangy scalps—all the frumpery of the small-time touring actor. By September of '64 this stuff was being used in the two theaters of sorts which had been established in town, one in the hall above the post office on south Jackson Street, the other in a hall next door to it. The second-story room was frequented by minstrels and the ground-floor place by legitimate actors.

Minstrel troupes stopped long enough to rattle their bones a few nights before moving to Summit, or Nevada City, or Salt Lake City; the acting troupe was mostly local and semi-permanent. This little band of experienced, strolling actors and stage-struck amateurs was well enough known in September of '64 to command a Grand Complimentary Benefit for actor James Martin. For this they did Colman's tragedy, *The Iron Chest,* plus a broadly interpolated French vaudeville, title altered to fit the town, *Wanted a Thousand Young Milliners for the Idaho Gold Diggings.*

Public support of these sporadic entertainments had been so encouraging that DeWitt Waugh, local band leader, decided to launch a winter theater season. He hired the local troupe, and leased a hall directly across the street from the post office accommodations for them to play in (the same building which would later become the Catholic Church). He called it The Montana Theater. Dimsdale lauded this cultural scheme, saying in the *Post,* "A place of innocent amusement where we can take our families without fear of insult is an absolute necessity.

We are assured by these gentlemen that nothing will be presented on the stage or permitted in the house, that can offend the most fastidious. Strict order will be maintained." [7]

The b'hoys packed the house on the night of December 10th in spite of such a lily-livered attitude, and they evidently behaved themselves, perhaps because the management had hired "an efficient police . . . to enforce order." At least, Dimsdale didn't complain of their behavior as he did in 1866, when he wrote: "As the house is perfectly secure and strong none need stay away, unless, indeed, it be the young men whose vulgar behavior and loud calls were evidence of want of good sense, which rendered their room more valuable than their company." [8]

The b'hoys' first-night decorum completely belied their later uncouthness, one night of which was described in the *New York Tribune:*

> During the performance, several babies and an enterprising dog were running about the floor, and occupants of the gallery amused themselves by tossing apples over the heads to their friends below. Like most of the male spectators, my companion and guide had a navy revolver by his side. It was a mixed crowd, often boisterous, but never indecorous; for there were half a dozen wives and sisters present. . . .[9]

Surprisingly, the audiences in Con Orem's Melodeon, a variety theater, were more decorous. Con had a way of stepping from the stage and giving belligerent patrons "something in the line of 'one, two,' " if they made snide remarks about his show.

The uncritical miners liked the play-acting in spite of their rudeness, for it was a place where, three times a week, for $1.50 they could "forget for a few hours that they are in the depth of winter and almost cut off from the rest of the world by

insurmountable barriers of snow." Waugh's company did a series of plays which might have been written especially for the b'hoys: *Nick of the Woods, Poor Pillicoddy, The Serious Family, The Honeymoon, Lucretia Borgia,* etc.; American melodrama, French farce and drama translated for the London stage and pirated to the United States. Not only was Waugh's selection of shows right to interest the b'hoys, but he was also showman enough to hire popular local performers to draw the crowd. He presented local beauties and precocious youngsters on his stage, and sold tickets to all of their friends (Judge Hosmer's young son appeared in several roles). Upon occasion he also presented local topical songs such as "Quartz Upon the Brain," written by Ben Holladay's local agent, Nat Stein.

The troupe worked hard, rehearsing and playing in three different shows each week, a box-office necessity, but a feat of memory so impossible that in Virginia City theaters (as in most stock-company theaters of the time) Dimsdale was astonished when no offstage voice was heard during a performance: "It should be stated as an extraordinary fact that the 'Lady of Lyons' was played 'without book,' from memory, only. It is rare to find a company that can do this." [10] In addition to trying to memorize three full plays a week and performing in them, the actors clowned through three one-act afterpieces, perhaps sang a song or shuffled off a dance for good measure, and put together their own costumes as well.

All this they did for a pittance of weekly pay, a minimum which the leading actors of the troupe supplemented through benefit nights tendered them by their fellows and by Mr. Waugh, nights on which all the receipts above house expenses were theirs.

Their entertainment couldn't wean the b'hoys away from the more heady pap of the saloons and dance halls, however. Dimsdale admonished them time and again to take in the show tonight—but in spite of such press support, DeWitt

Waugh closed his season in March, and made no attempt to reopen in the fall. His actors tried to launch a spring season of their own in April, but closed abruptly on the 29th upon receiving the news of the death of President Lincoln.

Theatrical seasons in the next few years were rarely more successful, though several stars made money out of performances in the depopulated town, not so much from box-office receipts as from ostentatious gifts of gold dust, nuggets, and jewelry presented by town leaders, who still pretended to the world that their town was leader of the Territory. The Chapmans, the Couldocks, the Langrishes and the Irwins were all presented with mementoes of Alder Gulch worth as much as $1000.

But for the men who tried to make a local theater pay, there were no such angels; seemingly, they could not operate out of the red. DeWitt Waugh was only the first to fail. In January of '66 Dick Johnston opened The People's Theatre in a hall over the Montana Billiard Saloon, using the same company as usual: Mrs. Buzz Caven, Miss Perkins, William Norwood, and Ed Clark—as well as Billy Sheppard, who had brought a minstrel show to town and folded there.

The midwinter diversion attracted such good houses that Johnston expanded into a vacated store (never asking himself why the store was being vacated), installing in it the town's first complete theater. The *Post* was, of course, delighted with the new place on Jackson Street above Content Corner, claiming that it would hold 500 people (doubtful), and that it was an ornament to the city (possible—considering the rudeness of the other buildings). The new theater opened February 22, 1866, with a production of *The Hunchback.*

Less than two months later Johnston had given up his theater to DeWitt Waugh (his orchestra had been in the pit), who ran it for six benefit nights only, stretched over three successive weeks. Johnston had been unable to cope with the

decline in population, which at the same time was killing the Methodist church; the Rocky Mountain cold, which the one stove in his building could not drive off ("Very cold enjoyment" said one ticket-holder); the usual decline in ready cash among the b'hoys in the later winter months; and, most important, the opening of Con Orem's and Billy Sheppard's Melodeon directly across the street, a place where banjos twanged, the skits were bawdy, and a man could drink while he watched.

In May, Belle Douglass came to town, and rented the theater for a few performances. In June, O. W. Clipperton was managing it (ticket prices had risen to two dollars, but he said it couldn't be helped during the slack season). Briefly, he presented the celebrated Julia Dean Hayne, whom young Miller described as "a fine actress, a fine figure though not very strikingly handsome." In August Belle Douglass was back managing the theater, but on September 8 it closed its doors again. For a year following no one else was willing to take a chance on the place. Finally, Jack Langrishe presented the Couldocks there in September of '67, hiring the locals as support.

Langrishe operated the People's Theatre and made money, but he didn't try to produce repertory with a permanent stock company. Instead, he chose the time of his presentations carefully. He first came to town in September when the b'hoys were flush, drew them through the doors with stars internationally famous, the Couldocks—and gave them just two weeks of productions. He returned that same December (after first doubling the walls for warmth), but stayed only as long as the legislature was meeting, closing about the first of February. Almost a year later he returned to town, again staying only two weeks.

After Langrishe left, George Paunceforth, an actor who had arrived in town with him, remained behind to appear in and direct amateur theatricals. Their repertoire included *The Rivals,* after a performance of which Paunceforth inserted a

thank-you card to the people of Virginia City in the *Post,* in which he complained that their ovation had not been strong enough to call him in front of the curtain! After Paunceforth, William Norwood, of the original 1864 group, produced local shows throughout the '70's, shows in which the still faithful Mrs. Caven ever appeared, acting and dancing her inevitable Highland Fling. These, and occasional traveling minstrel troupes (one of which had to get out of town on foot when ticket sales flopped) were all the shows the town saw.

But Virginia City had never, even in its heyday, even when traveling stars appeared on the tiny stage of the People's Theatre, seen any first-rate productions, although Langrishe's shows had been far better than the limited stage and heavy production schedule ordinarily allowed. This was especially true when he was not hampered by the need of stars to play stellar roles. When he was free to develop shows as he saw fit, he did such things as an experimental production of *Don Juan* which attracted attention as far away as Nebraska, a complete version of *The Merchant of Venice*—not ordinarily seen in those days—as well as a modern-dress showing of *Romeo and Juliet.* This latter production led the *Post* to say, "The entire representations of this company are . . . superior to anything our citizens are accustomed to."[11]

During the same engagement, Langrishe had had to present Mr. Couldock in his famous title role in *Louis XI.* At this the paper complained:

> With a limited company, scenery, costumes, stage properties and stage facilities, it is simply an impossibility to present the standard tragedies familiar to the appreciative portion of the audience, in an attractive and successful manner . . . we think it will be admitted by the artistes and audience that for the present at least we must look for our most attractive performances in less meritorious plays.[12]

This was the *Post*'s most outspoken review in five years of publishing—and it kindly laid the blame on the play rather than on the fact that Mr. Couldock's insistence on appearing in his stellar role had made him lay an egg too large for the sixteen-foot width of the stage.

It was rare that the *Post* was so outspoken, for its mission was to support theater in Virginia City, in spite of its shortcomings. As Dimsdale looked at it, play productions were the most innocent entertainment in town. He considered them to be a moral force in the community, and commended their wholesome influence, saying:

> The performances at this popular place of amusement attract large houses and deservedly so . . . the regular company, affords a most desireable means of amusement to our citizens, and empty houses, formerly crowded with dancers, prove that genuine dramatic representation under proper management, contributes to public morality.[13]

This attitude must have been startling to actors who visited town, accustomed as they were to hearing theater and its people damned for loose morals by most editors and from every pulpit in the country. Even more amazing must have been finding themselves hobnobbing with a bishop. Langrishe and Couldock became friends with Mr. Tuttle, who found them to be far more gentlemanly than his parishioners.

The *Post*'s reviews of the productions in Virginia City were always kind, but occasionally revealed more than they intended. One opening night Dimsdale thought that "The entire arrangements were very creditable," and that Mr. Waugh was a "Genius of the Lamp on a small scale; providing . . . 'chiefly music, scenery and all other needful substances.' Considering the small means at his command the scenery is a very praiseworthy effort of art. The building is comfortably seated, on the inclined plane principle so that all can have a good view

of the stage. . . . The costumes of the ladies and of Mr. Martin were well chosen. . . . Mr. Miller, as 'Diggory,' in the farce was far ahead of most amateurs and will make a good low comedian in due time. As it is, a slight decrease of effort and a clearer articulation would render his comic singing excellent. . . . As the company get accustomed to each other, and opportunities of close study are afforded, there will be but little room for criticism." [14] Most of his reviews seemed to stress that everything was very successful "considering our distance from America."

Out-of-town newspapermen were more forthright. Richardson reported to the *New York Tribune* of the local production of *The Lady of Lyons,* "The beautiful diction of the play was rendered in a style which the fastidious and snobbish author would hardly have survived had he been there to see it." [15] Private reviewers were not kind either. Young Miller (the store clerk, not the actor) saw *Six Degrees of Crime* and complained to his diary of the "miserable Plot and miserable acting." [16] Another one of the b'hoys, remembering what must have been the local amateur theatricals, said, "A theater soon sprang up. And either because of the refined taste of some of the auditors, or the advanced talent of the performers, the playing was not the broad farce which might have been entertaining, but was confined to Shakespeare and heavy tragedy, which was simply disgusting." Of the more professional productions he wrote, " 'Nick of the Woods' has frequently been produced with great applause, though the illusion is somewhat marred by the audible creaking of the wheels of the boat in which the Jibbenainosay sails triumphantly over the cataract." [17]

Jack Langrishe was the only man who knew how to please the b'hoys when they came to the theater and he was mighty popular with them. The papers kept track of him long after he had done his last show in town, reporting his doings in Green

River, Wyoming; then as manager of a Chicago theater, where he was wiped out by the great fire; then as manager of *The Black Crook* company touring the New England states in 1873. As late as 1872 the b'hoys were still hoping he'd come back, and the *Montanian* printed a two-line tempter: "Manager, Chicago.—There is no theatrical company at present in the Territory. The 'opening' is a good one." But the editor's was an idle dream. Theater was dead in the Territory, temporarily. It and a great many other things waited on the railroad to bring more population and more trade into the country. The *Post* had prophesied truly, when reviewing Langrishe's final season; it had said, ". . . everyone is enjoying the rare treat that Mr. Langrishe has offered for the last time perhaps in years."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE HEATHEN CHINEE

ONE AFTERNOON a doctor, driving toward Virginia City in his buggy, was startled by shots popping in the diggings across from Nevada City. He looked up just in time to see one Chinese chase another across the tailings. When the pursuer was close enough, he knocked the man down with his shovel. The doctor saw the upright figure belabor the prone figure with shovel blade, until the prone man moved no longer. Then, when more shots sounded and a number of figures scampered across the gulch under a hail of bullets, the doctor drove for Virginia City with the news that the Chinks were embattled just outside town.

When the sheriff arrived, he found a couple of pig-tailed corpses which had been hacked to death, and not another slant-eyed divil in sight. But, picking through the hundred or so Orientals living near by, he somehow chose an Ah Wah and an Ah Yen as the culprits, and carted them off to jail.

The first trial of the two resulted in a hung jury. They had to stay in jail until the next term of court, but they didn't seem to mind their incarceration in the least, or to have any worries about the future. Model prisoners, they were allowed many visitors, who came bearing sweetmeats and hot Chinese

dishes to relieve the monotony of Western cooking. Sometimes a number of friends gathered in the cell to help the pair enjoy feast days. These guests were as polite as the prisoners, and always left quietly in a group when the jailer informed them their time was up.

The second trial closed abruptly when it was established that the two prisoners in the dock were not the two men indicted for murder and jailed. These were facsimile prisoners; the genuine articles were bound for China, having walked out of their cells amongst a crowd of their departing guests. The jailer and his white friends had always sworn that all Chinese looked alike to them.

This peculiar blindness toward the yellow man was congenital to the b'hoys in Virginia City. They couldn't see him, because he was a heathen and a slave. To them his food was revolting, his music god-awful, his women all whores, his scent of musk and opium sinful. Furthermore, they couldn't hear him because his language was an offense to the ears, even names being abominable, so they called each man John and each woman Mary.

They kept their eyes closed and their ears stopped because rumor said John Chinaman was of the dregs of the Chinese Empire, and thus beneath their notice. Rumor said he was pouring toward Montana by the thousands, ready to take every white miner's job from him. Rumor said that he ate mice fried in axle grease, that he lost his strength when his queue was cut off, and that Mary was interesting anatomically. Rumor colored every b'hoy's emotions toward the Chinese, made him blind to their humanity; to him Chinks, niggers, and Injuns were all sub-human, strange offshoots of mankind, whom God had only half-formed. When one of the b'hoys swore he couldn't tell the difference between one Chinese and another, he really meant he was damned if he was going to open his eyes enough to notice any difference.

But the Chinese girls who worked as whores at the lower end of town made the b'hoys blink a little. These women had been sold into bondage by their families and had to serve out their selling price as prostitutes at so much per month. According to the *Post* ". . . [they] are bought and sold like hogs, the religion of their country pronouncing them to be without souls, and created only for the use of man." [1] Slave sales were not confined to China, these chattels being sold openly in Virginia City. In fact it was reported in the *Post* that one boss Chinaman offered to sell a girl to a "prominent gentleman" about town "at the rather exorbitant figure of $1000." The man declined the purchase as "this property was not the kind . . . [he] . . . wished to pay taxes upon." [2] Though slavery had been abolished in the United States, no great fuss was made about the Chinese slave market by either Union or Confederate sympathizer because the town was "not very intensely interested in the welfare of the heathen Chinee."

On the Virginia City market a young woman in good health could be marketed at $400 to $600; beautiful girls brought more.[3] Among the Chinese they were as valuable as real property in securing a mortgage, and a stray girl was advertised in the paper the same as was any missing property:

CHINESE ADVERTISEMENT

Wang Geu owes Dr. Yee Cheugh Five Hundred and Fifty Dollars. He can not pay it. So, according to Chinese law, he left his woman, Sing Gim, in Dr. Yee Cheugh's possession, as collateral, until the money shall be paid. All right. By and by, all same yesterday, Sing Gim stole Three Hundred and Seventy Dollars from Dr. Yee Cheugh, and ran away. Now then, all Chinamen take notice that if you keep Sing Gim, you must pay me Nine Hundred and Twenty Dollars, all same Wang Geu.

Dr. Yee Cheugh [4]

The wonder is that the Chinese-hating editor of this paper had not printed the notice under the heading ESTRAYS. As it was he sardonically hoped something would be done about the affair quickly because he was afraid that the advertisement would bring a fresh batch of missionaries to the Territory.

Many of the Chinese men sent to Virginia City were also slaves. If they were bought and sold on the local market, they made no headlines. Such transactions were not prurient enough to make news.

The men had a good chance to reduce the period of their bondage, for they were in demand about the town as servants and cooks at good wages. A woman's contract sometimes bound her for life by adding penalty time for the menstrual period which incapacitated her each month.

Something was always astir in Chinatown to upset the residents of the upper part of town. The most frequent of the weird noises that floated up street was the "stentorian roar" which announced the beginning of gambling in the Chinese gambling dens each evening at nine o'clock. "Greenbacks, opium, and joss-gods" were the stakes, and they gambled until the wee hours of the morning, leading one editor to complain, "We don't know and don't care how many years they claim to have been infesting the earth, and only wish they would go to bed like decent people and stop playing their infernal button game of 'Foo-ti-hoo-ti,' so a fellow could get a nap." [5]

Gambling started in Chinatown as soon as enough Chinese had arrived in town to make the games interesting. Naturally, few of the slave-laborers could afford the stakes of the uptown saloons, but they were anxious to bet their pittance against other pittances in a chance to better their lot. One good night at the tables could propel a laundryman out of the "washee" business into the position of boss gambolier.

The favorite Chinese gambling game in Virginia City was an uncomplicated guessing game which paid off the lucky

guesser. As many could play as could gather around the gambler's table, and each man could bet whatever he pleased, high or low. The gambling master's only equipment was a handful of copper coins, a cup and a pointed stick. When all was ready, the handful of coins went into the cup, the cup turned upside down on the table, and the coins counted out four at a time by means of the pointed stick. The bets were made on odd or even coins remaining, or whether one, two or three coins would remain after all groups of four had been counted out.[6]

White neighbors were welcome at the gambling tables. Those miners who had picked up "a slight acquaintance with the jargon of chow chow" found they could make a little money here without the risks of "bucking the tiger" in the uptown establishments. They soon got used to the thick wreaths of opium smoke which hung over the tables, it having as little effect on the olfactory nerves as tobacco smoke.

Chinese celebrations startled the town several times a year. The Chinese New Year was announced not only by the din of firecrackers, but also by the strange cooking smells, sweet and redolent of sin, which settled in the Gulch and wafted up Wallace Street. Strange concoctions were being made down there, prepared from the weird vegetables those yellow devils grew on the sod roofs of their shanties, and from the chickens, ducks and pigs which they raised for such occasions.

The polite Chinese invited everyone in town to partake of their feasting and celebrating, a hospitality which was never reciprocated. "About half the male population of town" visited Chinatown for one New Year ceremony. Everyone was invited to eat, but only the most hardy attempted the strange food, some claiming the meat came from the carcasses of slaughtered cats, rats and mice; others refusing, as the *Madisonian* editor put it, because the cooking was clean and devoid of the accustomed amount of American dirt.

Most of the visitors to Chinatown on this day were uninterested in eating; they had come to guzzle the good American whisky provided by their hosts. They came early and stayed late and lost all interest in any other proceedings—except that some thought the rumored Chinese custom of canceling all debts on this day would be a fine institution to apply to saloon owners about town.

The Chinese hosts and hostesses, "attired in the latest Pekin fashion," with their queues hanging at full length, the females, "hobbling along in canoes," received their gaping, bearded guests, with formal bows and pleasant smiles, urging them to tables loaded with delicacies. Crackerbox American cabins had been transformed into bits of old China: over the doors of each room were mysterious Chinese inscriptions, placards sprinkled with showers of gold leaf "suggestive of Fortune's shower of wealth." Weird images stood in the corners, incense smoke puffing up in front of them in great dragon-like spirals. Each Chinese, immaculate in holiday blue shirt, cap and trousers, was strangely changed here in his own abode, graciously giving each guest a congratulatory crimson fortune card.

Now, it was the miner who was foreign, but he didn't feel so, for his hosts were so danged courteous and kept urging more whisky and more sweetmeats and more cigars on a man until a fellow almost came to like the yellow cusses. Even the Chinese-baiting newspaper editor had to confess they had their good side on such occasions and grudgingly admitted, "Whatever may be said against them or their peculiar customs, they are at least entitled to the credit of generous hospitality on their festival days . . ." [7]

The annual "devil driving" exercises also drew crowds of the curious to the lower end of town to witness the "open war declared by Chinamen against his Satanic Majesty" and see the ceremony in which "he is chased around with chin music,

one string fiddles, and divil's fire . . . from one China house to another, until he hath not where to lay his head among the celestials, and therefore has to abide, for a time, with his 'heathen' white subjects." [8]

A Chinese funeral smiling its way up Wallace Street, the mourners throughout the ceremony appearing "to be in fine spirits, smiling like the last rose of summer," disturbed the Victorian white more than these other heathenish practices. Such a happy funeral was foreign to Victorian human nature, which had to placate grim Death with a show of grief-stricken mourning. The strange customs of lowering buckets of food into the grave after the corpse, providing the body with a change of underwear and a clean towel, and the like, they could understand, for even the native Indian practiced such superstitions. But at least the Indian had sense enough to wail and mourn a little. This gaiety, this wearing of white mourning bands, this enjoying brandy and cigars at the graveside and this contented smile on the face of a bereaved husband as he provided his dead wife with food, made the Oriental more inscrutable than ever—really put him outside human feeling.

This anti-Chinese sentiment was originally a California import. There, where so many thousands had arrived, much bad feeling had been aroused, most of it based on the rumor that the Chinese were going to take away jobs from American miners, a thing which never did develop. Californians had brought hard tales of the "yellow peril" to Virginia City. Consequently, the town was prepared to hate them. When the original contingent arrived by stagecoach in June of 1865, the *Post*, under Dimsdale's editorship, scornfully listed their names as "Ho-Fie, So-Sli, Lo-Glung, Ku-Long, Whang and Hong" and jibed that, because of their arrival, all the mice in town had declared a retreat.[9]

Through the sixties and seventies this hate campaign was carried on by successive newspapers and editors. They in-

formed their readers that every Chinese in town smoked two dollars' worth of opium every day—forgetting they had previously assessed his wages at a lowly eight to ten dollars per week.[10] The *Montanian*, in referring to the custom of feeding the dead, remarked that "If the living were with the dead, we don't know of any object we would give money for more freely than to buy grub to strew over the mounds that cover their dead carcasses." It further said, "We don't mind hearing of a Chinaman being killed now and then, but it has been coming too thick of late . . . soon there will be a scarcity of Chinese cheap labor in the country. . . . Don't kill them unless they deserve it, but when they do—why kill 'em lots." On another occasion, the editor noted that nine out of ten Chinese had "kleptomania in the worst form, and the prospects for an early Chinese funeral are brightening." [11]

The bitterest of this feeling was expressed in the early 1870's, when the town was almost as much Chinese as it was white, some 272 of the town's 867 residents being Chinese.[12] Actually, the Chinese population had grown by only about one hundred since 1866, when there had been 150 of them in town, including nine women and one baby. At that time only twenty of the men had been miners, the rest being in the "washee business" or working as servants.[13]

Yet violent quarreling between white and Chinese, as reported in the papers, was the exception rather than the rule. One serious altercation between white and yellow miners occurred near Virginia's suburb, Central City, where the Irishmen had been throwing tailings in a Chinese company's ditch. Naturally, the Irish carried the day. Germans and Chinese found themselves sometimes at odds and cursed each other roundly in "fractured English. When they came to the goddlemighty portion of the debate every window-pane in the street rattled." On one occasion, in a fair fight with a Caucasian, the Chinese had succeeded in blacking the eye of his opponent

and was winning the fight, when his queue slipped and provided his opponent with an excellent handhold: finis Chinaman. But these altercations were no more serious than the fisticuffs which were always a part of the Virginia City scene.

The Chinese was something of a fighter. Perhaps his method of fighting, knife in one hand, hatchet in the other, discouraged many white bully b'hoys. Their duels resulted in lopped-off ears and gouged cheeks if not in death.

The antagonism toward the Chinese in Virginia City could not have been directly economic. In the first place, no white mine owner hired any Chinese miners. The Orientals bought and worked only claims that had been worked before—ground the white man did not want. There was little competition in other business. An occasional Chinese operated a store, but it carried mostly Chinese goods. Sometimes the boss Chinese imported silks for local consumption, but they could not have been much competition to local merchants. Nor did the Chinese work for lower wages than the white man in jobs open to both. Those who worked about the town as cooks and servants were paid the prevailing wage for such work, about sixty dollars per month.[14]

Only in the laundry business were the Chinese ever directly charged with eonomic competition, and that happened in Helena. There a "Committee of Ladies," the laundrywomen, notified sons of Cathay that "they must suspend the washing or laundry business immediately"—an affair that was put into rhyme by the editor of Helena's *Montana Radiator:*

> Chinamen, Chinamen, beware of the day,
> When the women shall meet thee in battle
> array!
> .....
> Ye hopeless professors of salsoda and soap,
> Beware of the fates that await ye,

No hangman's committee with ladder and
rope,
But the ladies are coming to *bate* ye.
Ye almond eyed leather faced murthering
heathens!
Ye opium and musk stinking varments,
We will not object to your livin' and
breathin'
But beware of the washing of garments.
To stay or go ye can do as ye choose,
To us it don't make any odds
So long as ye keep your hand off of the
clothes,
And keep out of the lather and suds.[15]

In Virginia City they were accused of charging "four bittee" for "spoiling boiled shirts" but received no threats from the laundresses. The accusation, made by the *Post,* was unwarranted. Bishop Tuttle found their work to be neat and clean. The charge was just a part of the paper's general hate-the-Chinese campaign.

No matter what John Chinaman did, he could not be accepted. If he tried to be Occidental, his efforts were resented even as much as his Oriental ways. If he tried to buy the house a drink in Western manner, he was scorned. When he went on a 'Melican-style party and galloped whooping around the town he very soon found himself thinking things over in the little log jail.

Chinese had no Sundays off, delving from dawn to dark every day, wielding the pick and shovel "with the strength of Sampson and the patience of Job." These miners worked in companies of about fourteen men each, each company with its own cook and living quarters. Most of the time they worked all winter stripping claims, getting ready for the spring sluicing. They worked very primitively, using wheel barrows to

trundle the dirt to creek bank, "rewashing old dirt heaps, and making money where anyone else would starve." They were grudgingly admired for their strength:

> Chinamen are heavy on the pack. While the heathen is apparently physically deficient, he can carry a load that would disgust the boss mule of a pack-train. One was noticed going down the gulch with two large rolls of blankets, a sack of rice, a couple of hog's heads, a lot of heavy mining tools, a wheel-barrow and a hand-rocker swinging to his pack-pole. It was a mystery how that Chinaman managed to tote that weary load along so gracefully, and not grunt a groan.[16]

Still, this prowess did nothing to bring them equality with the whites. One could not appear as a witness against a white man, nor could he find justice for himself in the lower courts. Usually little attempt was made by the court to understand the facts if the case concerned only Chinese. In an assault-and-battery trial, in which fifteen Orientals testified, "His Honor, with complacency, singled out the ugliest pig-tail, imposed a one dollar fine and costs and dismissed the outfit. . . . After which Policeman Dan Hammond drove the band downstairs by order of the court." [17]

In another case of one clan against the other, the question of swearing the witnesses by use of the "chicken oath" arose, the prosecuting attorney contending "that unless the chicken was killed it would be no swear for a Chinaman."

The legal nicety in the case, as in all frontier cases involving depositions by Chinese, was whether or not the traditional ". . . and nothing but the Truth, s'help me God" was binding for a heathen. The "Chicken Oath," as used in Chinese courts, was felt to be binding, and hence used occasionally in Virginia City courts when the case involved a white man—or in a murder case, such as this one for which the oath was given:

> . . . Copies of the oaths to be administered to both parties were written in Chinese and handed to them, at the same time each one put a piece of red josh paper into his pocket. Two fowls were then brought in for the purpose of being sacrificed for truth's sake. The head of the first was stretched across a block of wood, behind which were ranged three of the witnesses. A hatchet was handed to the first in the line, who struck the chicken a blow in the neck, the other two Chinamen followed, and the third blow dispatched it. The other fowl was served in the same manner by the two interpreters and the remaining witness. While the fowls were still bleeding, the individuals who were to be sworn stood up before the Clerk and burned the oaths which they had subscribed, at the same time repeating one in their own language, which ended the ceremony.[18]

According to the Chinese, the belief was that if a man so sworn lied, his head would be chopped off in a similar manner.

To go back to the prosecuting attorney, the judge in his case decided that the oath was unnecessary since the case involved only Chinese! Subsequently, the Chinese witnesses answered "yes" to every question, convicting every case—which, the editor remarked, "was a good thing for the school fund." [19]

This lack of justice in the court bothered no one; a Chinese trial was just a good show:

> . . . The scene beggared description. . . . Their eyes set at a tangent with their noses; their queues bound round and round their heads, leaving stray locks standing upright or hanging pendant to their shoulders; dressed in every conceivable variety of American and Chinese wearing apparel, from top boots to black bags with arms in them, and all chattering like so many magpies over a carcass; . . .[20]

When the proceedings involved a Chinese "bad girl" who had been robbed while performing an Oriental dance for some white boys, "the full details of which are unfit for . . . a modest newspaper," a real carnival developed, for, during the dance, "Mary became drunk with excitement and stripped off her cotton trousers and nankeen chemisette. Her pantalettes contained a roll of $100 in greenbacks, a gold josh god, and other Chinese valuables, all of which Mary lost." She charged the white boys with stealing her property, and the police court heard testimony for a full two days of fun at the poor girl's expense. At the end of the proceedings, the judge told her, "Mary, from China, stand up! and listen to the majesty of the American law! . . . It now becomes the painful duty of this court to pronounce final sentence upon you! . . . This court decides that you, while in company with white fellers, hereafter, (if you want to keep your green backs) do KEEP YOUR BREECHES ON!" [21]

A type of legal heckling was tried by the local legislators who passed various acts to discourage the Chinese. The year following their appearance in town, a bill to tax them appeared in the Territorial Assembly, but failed to pass. Later a license law charging Chinese fifteen dollars per quarter for the privilege of washing and ironing was passed, only to be repealed at the request of Governor Ashley after the signing of the Burlingame Treaty between the United States and China. This treaty, which guaranteed equal rights to citizens of each country residing within the borders of the other, was much resented by some of the miners and legislators. Representative Sample Orr suggested that no foreigner be allowed to work in mines if he had not legally declared his intention to become a citizen, but this was impractical. The Assembly of 1872 passed an act stating that "no subject of the Empire of China known as Chinese, shall acquire, possess or hold in the Territory of Montana any real estate, or mining claims or placer or quartz

mines, or any interest in or to real estate, or mines of any kind or nature whatever." [22] The law was on the statute books until 1874, when it was voided by decision of the Supreme Court of the Territory, which said that a Territory cannot interfere with or control public lands within its boundaries. This settled the matter of legislating against them; anyway the scare was over—no hordes of Chinese had descended on the state. Most of the Oriental emigrants had stayed in California where they had landed.

In spite of their many discouragements, the Chinese outstayed most of the placer miners in the gulch. Coming and going from China, one worker being replenished as another left, they worked most of the gulch below Virginia City by hand, taking about forty years to complete the job, finishing about the turn of the century. The other races which had landed fresh from the old country in Alder Gulch had learned American ways and had become assimilated. The Chinese did not; they stayed together, retaining their customs and dressing in Oriental fashion.

They are remembered in 1900, working the lower end of the gulch, a colony of about 200 living in cabins as neat as a pin and still raising their own Chinese vegetables in gardens on the sod roofs. The attitude toward them had changed considerably in the years since their first appearance in the gulch. "They were a fine people," say the septegenarians in town. They remember the strange log temple at the foot of Wallace Street which contained a beautifully decorated altar presided over by a "real priest." It was well worth a visit just to hear the strange music played by a band of stringed instruments.

The last of the two hundred, an old woman, "China Mary" of course, lived in town all alone as late as the twenties, telling of her ribald early-day experiences as a prostitute as matter-of-factly as if she were relating schoolgirl memories.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE SMALL FRY

THE KIDS in Virginia City lived in a town which might have been built for their delight. Boardwalk, corral, graveyard, livery barn, Chinese laundry, stagecoach station, blacksmithy, mine tunnel, and deserted cabin were places which reeked of adventure. In them there was loot to be gathered, or curses to be learned, or tales to be heard. Everywhere there were people who dug for G-O-L-D, who believed in buried treasure, and who showed nuggets as big as peas to prove that it existed; there was such talk of wealth that every lad tried to pan gravel before he was eight, and saw enough specks of color to prove to him that he walked over fortunes every day—if only he knew just the right spot to dig. There were soldiers, hunters, stage drivers, freighters, and packers to hero-worship. There were Injuns stalking up and down Wallace Street. 'Course, they weren't much account; they were only Bannocks—and *real* Injuns figured the Bannocks to be so low-down that they called crickets "Bannock Buffalo." Even the newspaper said, "Lo, the poor Indian, has

grown wonderfully fat since the grasshopper invasion," and hooted at their attempts to imitate the white man, ridiculing a young squaw who paraded proudly down Wallace Street in old hoops for a hoop skirt ("What do you call them, a set or a pair?")—wearing them outside her buckskins. Still, a stick gun could draw an ambush bead on a feathered chief from behind the safety of a board fence. . . .

But sometimes two or three hundred of 'em would come out of their camp in the hollow beyond cemetery hill to parade down Wallace Street after a fight with the Nez Perces, ki-yi-ing in a way that made a body want to be home and in bed as soon as it was dark, no matter how much fun the paper made of their parade:

> . . . through the streets of Virginia, through its mud and filth, the spectacle moved in stately grandeur, furnishing a nine minutes wonder to the staid people of the burgh. Fixed on poles, like Gesler's cap, were the scalps of the slain, fresh and gory, trimmed with gingham ribbons and the long black hair dangling about like cow-tails in fly time. To carry these, two healthy looking squaws, grim, obese and slatternly, with the sins of fifty years upon their idiotic heads, and the filth and grease of a generation on their tattered buffalo robes, were selected. Ranged on either side, as they marched by the front, were some fifty squaws, papooses and dogs—sloshing through mud up to their knees, and joining in the infernal ee-e-yoh, ee-e-yoh, of the big medicine man in front, who furnished the instrumental music for the occasion on a tamborine, which had got frosted and was swollen to the size of a tub. Chief Marshal and grand conductor of this motley procession of Indians, dogs and vermin, was an untutored buck, mounted on a cayuse, ancient and lean, who conducted them through the principal streets to the lower end of town, where the procession disbanded to hunt cold victuals and "ol' clo's," up the back alleys.[1]

Maybe the scalps looked like cow's tails to middle-aged eyes, but younger ones spied the blood and the skin, and scanned knife and tomahawk for clues of recent gore.

Vigilantes strode about town, also, like ordinary men, but hinting at dread deeds done at the black of midnight. Though mum was the word, Pop knew them all and pointed out the ones who had hoisted the awful rope with its squirming burden (sometimes a lad wondered if Pop hadn't been there himself, but it would never do to ask). Their secret password, 3-7-77, was gruesomely said by some to be the dimensions of a grave. It was still whispered by those who played at Road Agent and Vigilante among the graves on Boot Hill. There each spring bloomed a flower whose petals were spattered with tiny blood-red spots, and there each new blade of grass curled into loops making a "perfect hangman's noose"—to the chilling awe of all make-believers.

On nightmare nights these make-believers felt the rope rough around their necks as they swung into space with the pudgy face of X. Beidler grinning up at them from below their dangling feet. But the dreams of children who had lived in town through the hanging days of '64 were no make-believe —they were remembered scenes in which they once again saw the strangled faces of the five tortured bodies, and heard once more the hysterical pleas of a man about to die and the pack-yelps of the b'hoys who were doing the hanging. Even during waking hours a glimpse of a street crowd could mean only one thing: hanging; the twang of a fiddle string could bring back the sound of a suddenly taut hempen rope.

These awful things frightened Mollie Sheehan until the town she had loved to wander in, picking lambs'-quarter and talking to the friendly b'hoys, became more scary than a haunted house. Her every errand to the store was run in fear, and her mother's parting words to her, whenever she went out the door, were "Run now, Mollie, don't be afraid."

Mollie was first frightened on the day the Vigilantes hanged the five at once:

"Coming home from school one winter day, January 14, 1864, I cut across the bottom of the gulch, climbed the steep hill, and passed close behind a large cabin which was being built; people were gathered in front on Wallace Street; the air was charged with excitement. I looked. The horror of what that look photographed on my memory still sends a shiver through me. The bodies of five men with ropes around their necks hung limp from a roof beam. I trembled so that I could scarcely run toward home. The realization flashed on me that two forms were familiar; one was Jack Gallagher;* the other was Club-foot George, who used to notice me and speak in a kind way. His deformity had arrested my attention and made me pity him. I did not know that he and Jack were 'Bad men.' " [2]

A few weeks later, little Mollie awoke to an early-morning commotion outside her house, and opened the door just in time to see a man make his drop in another temporary scaffold. She heard the rope creak in the frosty February air before she had time to close the door.

That same spring, a kindly storekeeper shooed her out his back door to escape the street ruckus kicked up by Slade and his no-good friends. She pelted home like a frightened cottontail, dashing from cover to cover until safe in her own house.

Before she had fairly gotten over this, she was an unwilling spectator to Slade's hanging—for the b'hoys, with never a mind for anything but a good high crossbar from which to drop a rope, chose the Elephant Corral right below Dimsdale's school in which to execute the man. From her grandstand seat, Mollie could see Slade dressed in fringed buckskin,

* Gallagher was a special friend of hers. He had traveled to Montana with the Sheehan family.

and could hear him plead at least three times, "For God's sake let me see my dear beloved wife." (This the b'hoys weren't about to allow, for she had stopped a previous attempt to hang her husband with her own six-guns.) As Mollie watched, someone shouted. "There she comes!"—referring to Slade's wife—and, as Mollie recalled years later, "A man in a black hat standing beside Slade made an abrupt, vigorous movement. I turned and sought the refuge of home." [3]

But for those late-coming children who had not been eyewitnesses to brutality, the adventures of bad man versus good man which had occurred right on this very spot were thrills without any of the horror. The building which had accommodated the mass execution became a kind of juvenile shrine. A really lucky lad was one who had been boosted into the attic above the drugstore now housed in it to see, in flickering lantern light, the ceiling beam with five horrid rope scars impressed into the wood, said to be the final marks made in this world by the five confessed road agents (the same marks gaped at today by thousands of tourists, adult and young alike).

A lad who grew up in Virginia City may have known a lot about the Vigilantes, but what he was really an authority on, although he didn't know it, was the Chinese, for he had seen queues and padded clothing, had heard the sing-song of the strange heathen language every day of his life. He knew more about the ways of the Chinese than almost any professor in the land: he had watched nimble fingers pluck music out of stringed instruments so often that neither music nor instruments seemed weird any more. He was one of the few white lads in the world who had shot off Chinese firecrackers, who had seen a yellow man smoking opium, who had looked through the holes in Chinese money, tried the brushes and ink which made Chinese writing, or seen the unbelievable chopsticks in action. He was one of the few whites in the world

who had eaten Chinese food—most of it stolen from the graves in the Chinese cemetery on the nights following Chinese funerals; free feeds of succulent roast pig and cold rice, washed down with a swig of fiery brandy, which the heathen had also left to comfort the departed.[4]

But, even as with their elders, familiarity with the Chinese, instead of leading to understanding, led to contempt. The Chinks were be-deviled in every way the kids could hatch: swipe their laundry, pull their queues, dump their suds, steal and sell their copper boilers, throw rocks at their doors—few b'hoys would say them nay. Pranks played on a laundryman sometimes led to a brief chase down the alley, spluttering Chinese yelling obscenities at departing backs. Most of the kids learned a little Chinese in this way, all of it profane.

Of course, any sort of mischief known to street urchins the kids learned whether it had to do with the Chinese or not. They had good examples in the antics of the b'hoys they so much admired; precepts with the sanction which newspaper reports gave for such high jinks. If the lads early learned to tin-can a dog's tail, to drop spitwads on the bald heads below from the gallery of the People's Theatre, to win all the Easter eggs from smaller boys by cracking their eggs with a painted porcelain one (winner keep the one which cracks first), the b'hoys who applauded had only themselves to blame.

The smaller sprites peeked under the swinging doors at the forbidden male world of the saloons and sniffed the odor wafted out from the bar, the mingling of tobacco smoke, raw cuspidor stench and the aroma from spilled suds and rotgut wet on varnish. The bigger fellows ventured inside. They returned bragging of initiation into the mysterious rites of the green cloth tables. Later in a secluded stall of a vacant barn, the secrets of the pasteboards were imparted to all who would learn. An eight-year-old playing on the cellar steps of Pfouts's store was heard to say. "Oh, hell on it, I can't hold a pair,"

to which his seven-year-old partner replied, "Steady, old hoss, it's no use getting riled."

More dangerous mischief was easily attempted, for black powder could be casually snitched for amateur blasting attempts, and cap-and-ball pistols easily "borrowed" for target practice out of earshot of meddlesome adults. Abandoned mines were explored by candlelight, against all edicts of parents.

All of these things could be done free, except dropping spitwads in the theater, but cash for such things as theater tickets could be come by. Even if parents were stingy, hours could be spent crawling over the accumulated trash beneath a boardwalk in search of dropped treasure, or peering through from above, crack by crack, retrieving big copper pennies, tokens from saloons, even a shinplaster or two with a wad of gum stuck to the end of a stick. When all other means failed to dislodge the booty, the boards could be pried up after dark, the treasure gathered, and the boards replaced.

There was gold in them thar hills, and any handy lad could pan out two bits' worth of color from abandoned tailings, if he put a little elbow grease into it. The piles of sweepings from barroom floors might have paid better, but usually bummers beat youngsters to these bonanzas. Favored children were sometimes allowed to clean the crannies of a sluice box: Mollie Sheehan and a friend worked over the riffles belonging to big Irish friends until they had collected enough gold to have rings made.

These same two little girls raised money by entering into a florist and green-grocer speculation. They were paid twenty-five cents in gold for each bouquet of wild flowers gathered and furnished to the hotels about town. These same hotelkeepers paid them $1.50 in dust per gallon for the lambs'-quarter which grew around the town (and still does). They were the only green vegetable available for their tables and

were much appreciated by their boarders. The girls suddenly stopped deliveries when their fathers discovered their enterprise and quashed it, thinking it unmaidenly of their daughters to have dealings with such places.

Youngsters who dreamed of spending robber gold spent hours searching for Henry Plummer's treasure. They dug up the floors of cabins said to have been inhabited by the robber band, and sometimes made expeditions to the ridge of the Ruby Mountains, high above the floors of the Stinkingwater and Beaverhead Valleys. Here, said oft-repeated tales, the road agents had kept a lookout and signal station where a man could spy on approaching stagecoaches or unwary travelers as they crawled their miniature way between Bannack and Virginia City. On this rocky ridge the bandits had buried their gold, it was said. It has yet to be found.

Though they had great potentials of wealth, the lads were often out of pocket money, exactly like the b'hoys. Then the ice cream at the Arcade Saloon was beyond the reach of urchins. Far better to follow the ice wagon on a scorching day and gather chips scattered from the iceman's flashing pick. Held on the tongue till one's eyes ached, one chip produced a heap of coolant for the overheated ten-year-old. And the supply lasted as long as he cared to follow the wagon.

Oh, there was plenty to do—and sometimes all night to do it in, for a number of parents figured that the frontier freed them of all responsibility and let their offspring run wild. Teenagers lounged about the town and hung about the dance halls most of the night. Elders wondered where in the world they got their money, and newspaper editors admonished them: ". . . boys . . . who loaf around dry goods boxes borrowing a 'chaw' of fine cut . . . you'll never roost higher than the position of a professor of buck-saw exercises." But the delinquents aped the b'hoys they so much admired and grew up "under the impression that swearing and blackguarding are

accomplishments par excellence of the male gender," heedless of editors who complained that they outdid San Francisco toughs in their knowledge of blasphemy.

The bachelor b'hoys paid only sporadic attention to the problems of kids all but abandoned in the West. Once when two little girls from Nevada City, daughters of a gambler and a whore, appeared on the streets of town clad only in their shifts, begging for food, they gave them food and clothing, but then shooed them on "home." Another time, when a young girl was made to support her father by working in a dance hall, they quickly ended his little game by clapping him in jail and shipping her off to the Midwest to live with relatives. Still another time, they warned child-beaters to desist or take a little lashing themselves some midnight. But they saw no necessity to bestir themselves further than these chance efforts, nor would they back a public-school system for Virginia City.

Dimsdale pleaded this as a necessity for the many children running wild (252 of school age—four through twenty-one —according to the school census of 1867),[5] though it would ruin the three private schools in town (his and two others), which educated about seventy pupils among the three of them for a tuition fee of $1.75 a week each.[6] Not until January of 1866 was there a public school in Virginia City, a two-year delay in this necessity in spite of all the columns the *Post* had filled arguing the benefits of a public-school law and a public school. Dimsdale pleaded that the town need hire only two teachers, for they could "manage with efficiency about one hundred and twenty scholars, or even more, by the aid of the monitorial system among beginners." He propagandized the kind of schools he would like to see in the town, stating that, "Drill in a common school should be exact and military. Children like it. It improves their health and abates the weariness of routine." He believed that "Boys and girls learn best together. Their seats only should be separated." He felt that a

boy trained under the coeducational system would never treat a woman unworthily, nor would any girl "so reared and treated . . . ever forget her dignity." [7]

Though Dimsdale had hoped that such a school would entice most of the school-age children within its doors, it didn't attract anyone but the same students who had been attending the private schools. The rest of the children ran wild, just as before. During the summer there were some jobs open to them; but during the school year they loafed. Not until the town slowed down in the seventies did as many as seventy per cent of the children come to school and hoodlumism decline on the city streets with the start of the school year.

Children then had neat fenced yards to play in (fences as much to keep the loose livestock out as to keep children in). Their parents had settled enough to plant gardens and start slips of trees. There were chores to do. Many town families kept a cow, a cow that had to be cared for, though the paper scoffed and said that menfolk looked pretty silly pulling teats. The b'hoys of '63 had married and become family men. They took baby for a piggyback ride on nice nights—though they might sometimes balance baby on the bar top as they had a quick suds.

The lads of Virginia City had it better than the girls, no doubt of that. They were free to wander where they pleased, while the girls of respectable families had to stick close to home. Not that the b'hoys would have wanted the girls tagging along, for all the creatures seemed to know how to do was chew gum. It came to be such a mania amongst the sex that the *Montanian* proposed an Anti-Gum Chewing Society, and the *Montana Democrat* remarked that the saying " 'you do not know enough to chew gum' is hardly applicable to some of the fair maids of Virginia City" and implored them to "introduce a little more grace to the motions of the jaw."

When the young ladies took no heed, the *Madisonian* printed a dire warning to "ye girl chewers of gum" in which it noted that a girl in town had had her jaws locked for more than an hour from what the doctor said was "the result of a long and daily practice of chewing gum."

No doubt of it, the lads had the best of it. No one cared if they chewed gum, or where in town they went. Free to wander where they pleased, they knew all the town characters: Bill Fairweather, whiskered and alcoholic, wandering desolately from saloon to saloon, dreaming spirituous dreams of the fortune he should still have, even his discovery nugget gone, lost one vacant day in '64; the Hermit of Daylight Gulch, the old recluse who lived in a lone cabin above town and claimed he was an illegitimate son of the first Napoleon; Old Brod, the Negro bootblack, who drank himself into insensibility now and then, whom the b'hoys had whitewashed once while he was passed out; Mr. Charles Bradbury, the traveling scenic artist for Drake's Plantation Bitters, who had come all the way up the Missouri River from St. Louis "decorating the rocks and trees and river banks in cabalistic characters, expressing the peculiar virtues of Drake's Plantation Bitters." This great man, who was going all the way to Sacramento and then back to New York, painted his message on Virginia City hydrants surrounded by his young admirers. His inspiration must have caused the daubing of a passel of back fences.

Oh, there was plenty to do—and they didn't need no organizations: "The attempt to establish a young Men's Christian Association, in this town, fell through. It appears, from a canvass made, that the young men of Christian tendencies were not numerous enough to start the organization."

And there was lots to learn in Virginia City. For one thing, there were the intricacies of the tooth-jarring jew's-harp to be mastered: "We have no brass band in Virginia City, but we have the next best thing to one. A large lubber of a boy, with

freckles on his nose as big Mexican dollars, and a stonebruise on his left heel, discourses jewsharp music on Wallace Street, every other evening in the week. It will be no use in Prof. Charpie coming here to instigate a brass band as long as that boy holds out, and he is a healthy urchin."

But most of all, there was the thing that really mattered to be learned: how to wrest gold from the ground. The kids in the mining gulches could tell a piece of quartz from a piece of sandstone as easy as pie. They could get color in a pan any old time. They knew how to twist the drill and hold it steady while the double jack swung past your head, unerringly to the drill-head. They knew the value of each claim in the vicinity as well as the assayer. They knew how to make the color show by shaking the Long Tom. They prospected for gold outcroppings in the hills as other kids searched for good fishing holes. Eventually they knew how to tamp the black powder carefully into deep-drilled holes in solid rock, or gingerly experiment with the new dynamite explosive. They knew geology before geography. Their greatest ambition was to have a piece of a quartz claim when they grew up.

In this love of gold, as in their love of mischief, the small fry were aping their elders. Perhaps they got into no more devilment than other boys in other places, but here they had the support and example of older males. Too often, practical jokes and prejudice went hand in hand. Boys could see little wrong with stealing Chinese graveside food when they were supported in the enterprise by the cheers of the miners and applauded by the recognition of the newspaper editor. In fact, the actions of the "b'hoys" are often difficult to tell from the mimicry of the boys, for at times the former were pretty childish. It was difficult for a young'un to grow out of this childish playfulness, and consequently vestiges of this wild humor, the heritage of the mining generation, still outcrop in the mountain West.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

RIVERS TO RIDE: WATER TRANSPORTATION

BECAUSE VIRGINIA CITY sits aslant, spring thaw makes each street a temporary stream bed, and running snow water washes upper-town silt onto lower-town neighbors; sudden escape channels furrow gardens; winter's debris is left piled high in the neatest yard. The gurgle of water rushing downhill fills the air. Daylight Creek turns brown; Alder Gulch Creek swells by the hour and runs out of its banks for days. Everywhere there is water tumbling down and away until one can fairly feel the pull of the Mississippi draining mountain water to the Louisiana bayous, to cool the alligators of the delta.

Alder Gulch water joins the Ruby River a dozen miles downhill from town (near Robber's Roost, Pete Daley's Stage Station, alleged meeting place of road agents); the Ruby dawdles for a brief fifteen miles through the hay meadows about the shady town of Sheridan, until it and the Beaverhead form the Jefferson. This short swift river carries the Alder Gulch water to join the Gallatin and the Madison and to form, only ninety miles from home, part of the Missouri's silt-laden flood which will come together with the Mississippi under the

docks of St. Louis. Standing atop Boot Hill, watching the water trickle into Alder Creek, a man wonders if any of the gold ever washed as far as Natchez.

The pull of water eastward was felt by the b'hoys in Virginia City in the 1860's also, for they thought that the Missouri was to be the Territory's great trade route with the East, the Ohio River of the Northwest. They so confidently expected a great "sea-port" to arise at the head of river-boat navigation on that river, that they spent time and money trying to promote towns which could wrest this business away from Fort Benton. The Fort, they contended, was too far upstream; boats couldn't make it all the way to its docks in low-water years. (In 1865 twenty steamers left St. Louis for Fort Benton, but only six reached their destination; two sank on the way, and the others were forced to unload downstream.)[1] Freight unshipped downstream forced Virginia City businessmen into expensive delays while the little steamer *Deer Lodge* shuttled back and forth from Cow Island to Fort Benton with its minute cargo of goods. Sometimes merchants had to send wagons after freight disgorged even farther downstream. Virginia City speculators blamed the boat-owners of St. Louis for sending out crafts which drew more water than the upper Missouri could give, but while they were cursing them, they were planning how to make downstream unloading put money in their own pockets.

Two different companies obtained charters from the first Territorial Assembly for the rights to build roads to proposed Missouri River ports and to establish cities there. They were not the first to speculate in likely spots for towns along the Missouri, for W. B. Dance, James Morley and others had hiked from Bannack to the headwaters of the Missouri in 1863 to establish a claim to the city which they were sure would rise here. At another time, this same "Judge" Dance left an upriver boat at the mouth of the Yellowstone to lay claim to

ground on which to build a city. Unfortunately, the Judge got so interested in his town site he missed his boat, rode after it until the horse gave out, then traveled by foot in a "desperate situation" until he reached Fort Galpin, from where he took the next boat.

To go back to the chartered river-port companies, one operation was called "The Missouri River and Rocky Mountain Wagon Road Company." In this company the ubiquitous city-speculator, W. B. Dance, was associated with N. P. Langford, S. T. Hauser and others. They had their eye on the mouth of the Musselshell River as a port site.

The second company, more elaborately planned, was to establish a town at the mouth of the Marias River named Ophir. This place was supposed to become the trading hub of the Northwest. The charters to create this metropolis embraced those of the Marias Ferry Company, the Ophir Ferry Company, the Ophir and Flathead River Wagon Road Company, the Kootenai Wagon Road Company, the Ophir Town Company, the North Ophir Town Company, and the East Ophir Town Company. Associated in the enterprise also were the Missouri River Portage and Railroad Company, which was to make arrangements for portage around the Great Falls of the Missouri. Another company in the organization was the Upper Missouri River Steamboat Navigation Company, which was to make navigable the upper Missouri River from the Falls to the Three Forks in exchange for their franchise on this water. Governor Sidney Edgerton, who signed the franchises, was a holder in one of the companies. There were no conflict-of-interest worries in the good old days of Territorial Montana.

The other speculative enterprise, at the mouth of the Musselshell, was completed in 1866 and called Kercheval City. Much hullaballoo had accompanied the progress of this "city." In January the *Post* noted that N. P. Langford, President of the Company, had finished surveying the road to the

city, and stated that it would be a drive only thirty-five miles longer than that from Fort Benton, on an easy, water-level route which followed the Musselshell River valley 150 miles directly west to the mountains. The company claimed that boats always made it upriver as far as this spot and that freight, which was held up by the shuttle system, was sometimes here twenty-five days before the shuttle-boat *Deer Lodge* could bring it to Fort Benton. In February the paper stated that Captain Anderson and party had left to begin raising Kercheval City; it sounded like the biggest thing since Rome was built—and, similarly, it took more than one day to finish its warehouse, dock, and cabins. But in April the company announced that it was ready to handle three million pounds of freight, and that steamship companies would make a reduction of thirty-three per cent in freight sent to Kercheval City, because they could avoid the difficult river navigation on to Fort Benton. The company fathers were waiting for business.[2]

They were still waiting come September; thirty-three boats had puffed right on up the river past them to Fort Benton, for this was the year that small boats designed for Missouri River navigation began making the 2500-mile journey. The new city had also run into powerful opposition: a lot of St. Louis money was tied up in Fort Benton—and it had plenty of influence where the boats embarked. Such opposition surely hurt them, but the real stopper to first-season business was the fact that their road from the docks to the mountains wasn't finished (it was still being built in November), and every freighter in the Territory knew it. In spite of dock facilities superior to Fort Benton's, the only good thing that ever happened to Kercheval City was that it was named county seat of Musselshell County by Meagher's 1866 legislature, an honor it lost when Congress nullified the Assembly's acts. Within a year or two an exceptionally high spring flood carried the

hopes of the place toward New Orleans, though the site was briefly used as Fort Sheridan in later days.

Steamboating up the Missouri was just another speculation in gold-camp business, an enterprise possible only because the wealth of the mines made for high freight rates. The river, with its erratic channel, sudden ebbings, many sandbars, uncertain wood supply, and hidden sawyers (to say nothing of the difficulties encountered with swimming herds of buffalo and marauding Indians), was never meant for steamboat travel. The trip to Fort Benton developed into a once-a-year gamble which had to be ventured while water was high in the spring and early summer. Though boats were lost every year, in 1867, the biggest travel year on the Missouri, enough gamblers were attracted by the high payoff of a successful trip to put thirty-nine boats in the water.[3]

The 150 tons of goods in the hold and lashed to the lower deck were worth about $30,000 to a boat owner—more, if there was a big demand for space, and he could get thirteen cents a pound for freight; less if holds were only half filled and he could ask only eight cents a pound from shippers.[4] The hundred-plus passengers added another $8000 to the exchequer,[5] making them of less importance to the financial success of the trip than barrels of flour. Sometimes leaks in stateroom roofs soaked them, a thing that didn't happen to the valuable flour in the hold.

Captains of the little river boats were essentially business managers; it was up to them to make the voyage show a profit. They cut every possible expense, occasionally going so far as to hire only a skeleton crew, thus endangering the passengers and causing unnecessary delays. One captain skimped so that he bargained at every wood lot for fuel to fire his boilers, never filling up unless the price was right, adding days

to his trip because he made far more wood stops than necessary.

Still, the river boat was a favorite way of sending Virginia City wives and families home for a visit, or bringing them to settle in the West. One great advantage of boat travel was that each ticket holder could ship a lot more free baggage than he was allowed on the stagecoach. And the leisurely forty-five-day trip to Fort Benton was a very pleasant time:

> . . . The comfort of a good cabin, ample state rooms, regular meals . . . freedom from care, the delight of social intercourse . . . all were intent upon making the long trip before them one of unalloyed enjoyment. This sentiment displayed itself in little groups seated at the tables and around the stoves, some reading, others playing at cribbage, chess, backgammon and the never-failing euchre. . . .[6]

Passengers went ashore in hunting parties almost daily, easily keeping up with the slow boat, often having to wait to be picked up when they returned to the river bank because it was aground "as usual." Once out of the monotony of the prairie, the sculptured embankments of the Bad Lands made sightseeing worthwhile. Like cloud-gazers, erosion-watchers saw scenes in the weird shapes and pointed out Christ and his disciples in one group of erosions, or castles in Spain in another.

Lolling about the tidy Grand Saloon of a river boat was far nicer than hanging on for dear life aboard a speedy coach, and it cost less to ride, also. Stateroom passengers paid only $175 for the sumptuous accommodations, cabin passengers $125 for theirs "with cots." Deck passengers could ride for only thirty-five dollars, furnish their own grub.[7] Meals were on time (for those eating at table) and were tolerable.

Other than the fact that the quarters were small and there was no getting away from bores—or the howls of a passenger with the *delirium tremens*—the steamboat beat any other way of getting to Virginia City. The worst part of the trip, for early-day river travelers, came at the very end, when they were put ashore at Cow Island because their boat could go no farther, there to wait for days in a rough encampment for promised transportation which was to convey them any minute now to that near, yet so far, haven, Fort Benton.

Incidentally, river-boat men in the Southwest thought maybe they could dip thumbs in the Alder Gulch freighting pie. They pushed their boats up the Colorado River to within 400 miles of Salt Lake City. In a letter to the *Montana Post,* advising Virginia City merchants of their enterprise, "Pathfinder" reminded them that the southern route could be used all year. Dimsdale caustically answered the letter with the remark that the mountain passes between Virginia City and Salt Lake City were scarcely all-year routes, and reminded them that even when the snow had melted, their terminus was a good 500 miles farther away than Fort Benton. So ended the Colorado River's bid to float Alder Gulch gold.[8]

Although Missouri River steamboats sped downstream to St. Louis in two weeks or so, making as good time as the stagecoach, their June departure date was too early to be of use to most of the b'hoys. The downstream boats were crowded with families going for a visit and children leaving to be educated. But only those b'hoys left in June whose hopes couldn't be roused by the optimism that stirs a gold camp each spring. Most of the b'hoys, if they'd hung around all winter, stuck 'er out another summer, and headed for home in the fall. Autumn was the time, too, when businessmen left to bank their profits; when all those who dreaded another winter in the mountains headed for civilized hearth fires.

Consequently everyone wanted to go east at once (the exodus was given impetus by the annual rumor that the gold was played out). In September and October of 1864 it seemed that half the town was packing to leave. The newspaper noticed it: "Lots of folks returning to the states for the winter. *Say* they're coming back." [9] Diary keepers commented on it: "A train of forty four wagons is to leave here for Omaha on the 10th and thousands of disappointed pilgrims will accompany it." [10] And letter writers told of it:

> The greatest number of the emigrants that came here last summer are all a going home again this fall. They are leaving here every day. They say that the mines have been misrepresented at home. There is not room enough for the emigrants to work. . . . Unless they discover some new diggins by next summer this place will be gone up for there is no inducement for anyone to stay here.[11]

So many homesick souls with money to pay fares made one-way passenger carrying a good business. Naturally, the stagecoaches got some of this money, but not all of the coaches Holladay owned could have carried this exodus.

Thousands of b'hoys went back by wagon train, joining an outfit especially put together to cart people home. Franck and Sichel's was typical, a twenty-five-wagon train, mule-drawn, on which a man could ride to Atchison for forty dollars, furnish his own grub. Each passenger could carry twenty-five pounds of baggage plus his provisions. He rode in a wagon filled with eight or nine other people. Men riding their own horses could tag along with the train and have their baggage carried for thirty dollars. If a family hired an entire wagon for the trip, it cost them four hundred dollars.[12] Private wagons also made the trip. One which was parked in front of the newspaper office advertised its availability with a sign scrawled across its canvas, PASSIONERS FOR OMIHAW.

The wagons took two months of hard traveling to get home, sixty days of dirt and fatigue accompanied by the ever-present danger of Indian attack or early blizzard.

A far easier trip was by boat: floating down the Yellowstone or Missouri Rivers in specially built mackinaws which could navigate October low water because they needed only ten inches of it. Compared to the grim, jolting wagon trip across the plains, these were larking, holiday outings which wafted voyagers about eighty miles closer to home each day.

The b'hoys from Virginia City generally went east down the Yellowstone, because the embarkation point at the mouth of Yellowstone Canyon was only about a hundred miles away. Fort Benton, the Missouri River take-off point, was another hundred miles away, and it cost about twenty-five dollars in coach fare to get there—almost as much as the boat companies advertised as the fare to ride all the way downstream: "Ho! for the states . . . 600 passengers wanted . . . for thirty dollars a man can see America and the girl he left behind him." [13]

The mackinaws were built on the banks of the Yellowstone. There Lyman and Tomlinson had constructed a sawmill especially to saw boards for the boatyards which each year were building boats to outfit the several flotillas which coursed downstream in October. These were good-sized craft, thirty-six feet long, capable of carrying twenty passengers, their luggage and provisions as well as an occasional half a dozen oarsmen to surge the boat ahead at ten to fifteen miles an hour through dangerous Indian country (through which a few groups traveled day and night). These vessels were roofed overhead with double planks placed at an angle the better to bounce any Indian rifle balls which might be fired at them. The gunwales were also double-planked, and contained portholes from which guns could be fired. (Such outfits claimed they could "whip all the Indians between the Rocky Moun-

tains and Omaha.") Some of the fancier mackinaws featured double berths and sheet-iron stoves, but it cost seventy dollars for passage in such yachts.[14]

When the boats were ready and the cottonwood leaves along the Yellowstone were turning, the drummers for the boat companies arrived in Virginia City, artful dodgers who muscled in wherever two or three b'hoys were gathered, to turn the conversation toward cruising down the Yellowstone. In the last week of September, a man could scarcely come to town for a twist of tobacco without being asked if he was looking for a way to America. Competition between flotillas was stiff, since a man with forty boats had to round up 800 passengers to fill them. To attract customers, some of the bigger fleets offered free wagon-train transportation from Virginia City and Helena to Yellowstone Canyon and the flatboats.[15]

By the first of October there were several big encampments at the mouth of the Canyon, six or seven hundred people gathered in the colorful cottonwood groves as for a church picnic. Luggage and grub were piled together under a hangman's noose, a warning to pilferers to stop it or else. Everyone enjoyed a few days' rest until the boats were finished.

Once in the water, the mackinaws took off at a racing pace, sliding down the white water of the upper Yellowstone at the rate of 100 miles a day, stopping only briefly each day when the b'hoys had to jump lively to push two or three vessels from the rocks before the torrent swamped them, and at night. Once out of the rapids, a leisurely cruise began. Autumn cottonwoods lined the river with the color the b'hoys liked best, gold, shimmering hot against muted, stained, sandstone rimrock. They floated on a river of gold reflections, content and relaxed, though they warily viewed the sights through portholes: this beautiful country was claimed by the Sioux, and autumn colors could hide rifles ready to fire at exposed heads. The stately cottonwoods made it hard to believe that

this was Indian country; a passenger going downstream with a flotilla in 1865 described them as "giving river banks the appearance of a succession of magnificent old country seats."

Though the Yellowstone may have looked civilized, any group of boats which tied up along the bank at night put out sentries and readied rifles to protect them against Indian attack. They were made a little nervous by the fact that what looked like good camping grounds to whites had also looked good to red men, and they frequently found themselves sleeping in groves which had only recently been abandoned by Indians. At one of these spots they once found, on the peeled surface of a cottonwood tree, a rudely drawn Indian hieroglyph which they jumped to the conclusion was a treaty amongst the Indians for a common-cause fight against the whites. They slept but fitfully that night.

The flotillas tried to travel in close order in Sioux country, yet it took an hour each night to beach the many boats, a hectic sixty minutes of splashing in shallow water, of counting noses, making fires and lugging grub from boat to fireside, all the while watching upstream for errant boats while keeping an eye peeled for warbonnets. But, withal, a sunset time filled with silhouettes of softly moving boats drifting out of the colored western sky that the b'hoys allowed was prettier'n a Lithograph.

Ten days found a fleet at the mouth of the Yellowstone and nearly out of Indian country, 850 miles from the starting point. Now the flotilla began to break up, little groups of acquaintances traveling together at their own speed, camping where they chose, keeping only in ragged proximity to the others. Another three weeks of easy travel saw them in Omaha[16]—forty new boats used up in a month.

Few Indian war parties had the manpower to attack such a large group, but small parties of two and three boats sometimes fought naval skirmishes along Yellowstone waters.

These battles gave the Sioux no scalps, for a rifle ball fired from willow copse was too spent to penetrate gunwale planking, and a direct attack meant a slow, exposed charge through shallow waters, much too risky to be practical.

Other dangers existed for those who made their own boats and shared expenses. The fall of 1864 saw seventy-odd men start down the river late in October, having been held up building their own boats. They lost further time because their clumsy homemade craft, drawing too much water, drifted from sandbar to sandbar rather than bobbing over them. Then, above Fort Union, cold weather came and their boats froze in, forcing them to abandon their luggage and walk on to the Fort. Here most of them stayed, but a few tried to go on until storms, broken bones, and Indian fights forced them to hole up for the rest of the winter in the next forts downriver.

But such an ill-conceived trip was a rarity; traveling by mackinaw was not nearly as dangerous as traveling by coach or wagon, and it was one of the best ways of getting gold home safely as well. The lone stagecoach was often the prey of road agents, for others had come to replace Plummer's gang. (Only nine months after the Vigilante hanging spree, coaches to Salt Lake City were forced to stop running for a while because road agents had shot up a coach in Port Neuf Canyon, killing three men.) Gold was far better transported by mackinaw amidst the protection of hundreds—and so thought the b'hoys: in one group of 500 people floating down the Missouri from Fort Benton, there was also floating $1,500,000 in gold dust.[17]

As useful as the river routes proved in the early days of Virginia City, an expanding Territory needed something better. The steamboat was fine for carrying big loads of freight cheaply, but its once-a-year schedule was grating to men in a hurry. Mackinaw boats were all right for floating downstream,

but of no use upstream. What was really needed to connect them to the East, thought the b'hoys in Alder Gulch, was a railroad. A nice, regularly scheduled train from Chicago, like the Northern Pacific, which was building slowly westward, would be just fine. According to "the man in the wagon," its tracks would come up the Yellowstone as far as the canyon mouth. From there Virginia City vowed it should come up the Beaverhead close by them.

Everyone in Virginia City talked railroad. The b'hoys applauded the old gentleman who stood up at the railroad meeting in Nevada City and said "he felt railroad and rheumatism both to once. He was proud he was a native, circumcised American, and an advocate of the railroad." [18]

Unfortunately for his rheumatism, railroad tracks did not enter Montana until 1879. Eventually the Northern Pacific spur line from Whitehall did come to the mouth of the gulch, nine miles down grade from town.

CHAPTER TWENTY

PLACER TO QUARTZ TO RESORT: VIRGINIA CITY CARRIES ON!

BEFORE THE ALDER GULCH strike was a year old, b'hoys were panning along dozens of tiny streams flowing out of the Tobacco Root mountains, streams whose only virtue was that they were close to Alder Creek. Other b'hoys had ferreted out pockets of gold in Brown's Gulch, and Ramshorn Gulch, and had joined the middle-of-the-night stampede to the meager strike in Bivin's Gulch. They had climbed over the ridge into William's Gulch and Barton Gulch searching for placers, for Alder Gulch had all been staked. It had been staked by lucky men who had been pulled west by news of the strike at Bannack, and so arrived early on the far richer Alder Gulch diggings by happenstance. By June of '64 these lucky ones held all the ground worth having in and out of the gulch, and a visitor to the town noted, "Prospecting for gulch mines has petered. Old prospectors are discouraged and come in from a big stampede with their under lip sticking out a foot. . . . Many who have the spondulix to buy grub have turned their attention to quartz." [1]

Prospecting for quartz accelerated after January of '64 when F. R. Steele discovered a lode at the head of the gulch

while hunting. He named his new mine the Mountain Sheep after the animal he had been stalking and started to tunnel for ore. Deyarman, Sedman & Company built a mill near by, a handmade affair which clanked through its first ton of ore in October of the same year. As their building rose, feverish b'hoys tested outcroppings within earshot of the hammer blows, "racing from one prairie dog hole to another," hoping to uncover gold-bearing rock to feed through its crushers, though they had come west to sluice for nuggets. For a while it was a second stampede:

> Hundreds of lodes have been found. . . . When a new lead is discovered a rush is made to the spot, and in an hour it is filed on and recorded, and in many cases (at) the distance of a mile where there is not the shadow of a prospect for a lead . . . but as there is no water, wood, or the necessities to work these discoveries they are pre-empted and held as real estate, for further developments, and the arrival of capital and crushers to work them out.[2]

The quartz excitement was interpreted by Dimsdale as a sign of a new blossoming in the wilderness, seeded by bullion wrested from rock. Every outcropping of granite looked a sure lead to unschooled editorial eyes. He asserted in the *Post* that the time was at hand when mining must change its character from placer to quartz, and blithely claimed there was work for a thousand quartz mills in the vicinity, about as unprofessional an estimate as an investor could get. Even the next dreamiest amateur mineralogist claimed work for only 500 mills. Optimistic? Well, yes. Five years later the United States Commissioner of Mining Statistics reported only twenty-five mills and thirty-five arrastras in all of Madison County, and eight of the mills were not working.[3]

Dimsdale was a man with his head in the clouds when he interpreted the signs that bespoke a great future for his

adopted home; he could not but double-think permanent prosperity and growth for it in spite of the stampede to Helena. After all, his town had garnered the capital, and now countless veins of rich ore also seemed to augur continued growth. At the very time that he noted two b'hoys wheeling their duffel out of town on a one-wheeled cart, one pulling, the other pushing, bent on rolling their load all the way to Last Chance, Dimsdale wrote, "The 'Golden Arrow' points steadily to Virginia City as the future 'Queen City of the Mountains.' " [4]

He was not alone in prophesying that Virginia City had nothing but greatness ahead of her. That same spring the first mayor of the infant town, bedazzled by the omens he read in the paper, foresaw great things:

> . . . the monied capital of the country . . . will naturally find its way to this, the great commercial center of the Territory. The long distance we are from the places of mart . . . and the rapid strides Virginia City has already made toward commercial greatness give assurance that she has not now, or will she ever have in this territory, a rival in wealth, size, or importance. Every new discovery of mines within a radius of 200 miles . . . will add to our prosperity.[5]

It was quartz that made these men speak so, for other signs seemed to portend doom. Abandoned sluices, warping in the gulch, foretold the day when the gold would all be washed. Businessmen who spent more time at Helena "branch stores" than at headquarters bespoke a future in which Virginia City would discover it was tucked too far into the hills to continue being the trading center of the Territory. Helena stores were far closer to the new mining towns springing up, in addition to being nearer to Fort Benton, and close by the banks of the Missouri. This latter she was especially hopeful of—"What say you Virginia to our town being the head of navigation?" [6]

a Helena editor jibed, a dream as overblown as Dimsdale's hope that quartz would resurrect Virginia City's days of '63.

Not that there weren't millions in gold locked in near-by rock. There were. But unlocking it took some things that, for the present, Virginia City did not have.

First, she needed cheap rail transportation to bring the thousands of tons of heavy equipment across prairies and into the mountains—wagon freighters sometimes charged as much as twenty-five cents a pound to move mining equipment. Second, she needed a different kind of miner than she had. Quartz mining was too poky to appeal to the frantic placer miner who wanted to be home by Christmas. It required months of unpalatable planning and development. Furthermore, it took knowledge and experience to blast the rock-locked gold out of a quartz claim; tunneling into a mountain, following an elusive vein was for the professional, the hardrock, not the amateur. Consequently, though quartz looked good to the b'hoys when placer claims were scarce, they deserted quartz overnight to try for Last Chance gold-for-the-washing. Third, she needed money, for quartz mining took more capital than the b'hoys had.

Dimsdale knew the need for money; some of his prophecies were made as propaganda to convince Eastern capitalists that they could reap untold riches by speculating in Alder Gulch quartz mines. Yet, no matter how good he made the mines appear—and the *Post* made them sound like the best thing since the fabulous mines of Mexico, reporting assays on near-by leads that showed $291.65 to $2624.40 per ton[7]—it was difficult to get Eastern money invested in anything as remote as Montana Territory. They could make good money at home in war financing, and, after the cease-fire, in reconstruction. A group of capitalists told James Tufts, first Territorial Secretary on a visit to New York, that they wanted investments close by which they could keep an eye on, but that news of

substantial returns from Alder Gulch mines might get them to release cash for such a long-distance investment. Tufts also learned that there was considerable confusion in their minds as to just exactly where Montana was (a confusion that still exists). Gold strikes in Montana Territory often had been credited to Colorado—with the connivance of some Coloradans.

While they waited for money, Virginia Cityans lived on hope. A hope which grew greater as prospector after prospector filed his claim, wangled his grubstake and went back to prospect for quartz leads again, a more tedious search than placer prospecting, appealing only to the confirmed hardrock. One theory upon which he works is that all of this placer gold must have washed in from some near-by quartz vein. Sometimes two or more kinds of gold dust turn up in the prospector's pan; this shows him that there must be at least two quartz leads. If a particular kind of gold is found only at one point, or if the gold deposit is heavy only in one area, the chances are that the lead is near by. The frustrating thing is that, even though it be close, the vein is usually only two to four feet wide and may run in any direction. If it should happen to go straight into the hill, leaving only a cross-section exposed, it is extremely hard to uncover. A prospector is as perplexed as an early visitor to the gulch who wrote, "There is no mistake but there is plenty signs of gold here among the mountains but it is very hard to discover where the gold is to be found." [8]

The prospector, searching for the vein, looks for any likely outcropping of quartz near where he had good panning, and there sinks a test hole, three feet, ten feet, or maybe twenty feet deep. He may have to sink dozens of holes before he finds his lode, *if* he does. The hills surrounding Virginia City are pock-marked with these burrows attesting to the industry of the hardrock prospector. If the prospector finds a lead, before

he can gain title to it, he has to show clearly that he found it. In the 1860's he had to uncover the wall rock and deposit a specimen of this and the ore with the Recorder of the nearest mining district. This place was the discovery and was his, in addition to his right to make a mining claim against it by pre-emption.[9]

After he had staked his claim and placarded it with his name and the date of discovery, he was ready to announce his find. Usually, he secretly told his friends about it first to allow them to place claims next to his—those which should pay the best. More often than not he had no capital to develop his find and lacked the know-how of promoting it. If he was in no need of a grubstake, he went off into the hills again, chasing his ignis fatuus until he was in need. Then he peddled his claims for whatever he could raise on them and went back to prospecting again. In this manner, the speculator in quartz-mining properties, who bought from the prospector at the lowest price possible, soon had all the good property at a fraction of its value.

No matter who held the claim, the problem of raising money to work the mine and to buy the necessary machinery had to be solved, for quartz mining is an expensive process. A tunnel or shaft has to be driven to the underground ore, a time- and money-consuming task. The vein itself, once located, must be followed by another tunnel, a drift, which means more rock to be drilled, blasted, and moved to the surface.

In Alder Gulch in the 60's, a further problem was the disposal of the ore once it was above ground: it had to be taken someplace to be milled. Since building roads was expensive and freighting great amounts of waste rock long distances uneconomic (only an ounce or two of gold was extracted from each ton of rock worked), it was usually thought better to bring the mill to the mine, piece by piece.

Necessarily this meant that there must be ore on hand and

available in the future to keep the mill busy. When that much gold was not assured, but the assay was rich, an arrastra was more commonly used. This is a machine for grinding ore similar to the stone-wheeled flour mill. The ore is placed on a circular bed of stone and another heavy stone is rotated on it, dragged around a center post by a team of horses. When this ore is sufficiently crushed, the gold can be retrieved by the amalgam process—or if outstandingly rich, it can be panned.

Arrastras could be roughed together by handy men at little expense; mills had to be adjusted just so by specialists at high wages. Arrastras could be made from materials on hand; mills had to be purchased in the East and brought to the mine. Thus, by the time a steam engine and a mill had been dismantled and freighted to Virginia City, inched up the gulch and set onto a special foundation, housed from the weather, and water brought to it, costs had run to $30,000, $80,000, or $100,000.[10]

Such an outlay was sometimes impossible to the early mining companies. Then mills were built by independent operators (erected close by the mine), expecting to make a profit by charging for crushing ore and extracting gold. The milling charge spread from six dollars to fifteen dollars a ton at different mills, according to the ore to be crushed and the cost of getting the mill to the mine.

A typical mill was Christnott's $80,000 plant at Summit, described by Bishop Tuttle in a letter to his wife:

> I went through the mill and was delighted to see it. An engine of fifty-five horsepower drives four sets of two heavy wheels for crushing the ore. Each wheel weighs twenty-five hundred pounds, and two, fixed on a vertical shaft, revolve horizontally in each tub into which the ore is cast. Water and quicksilver are in the tub, and the quicksilver secures the gold in the amalgam. Some of the gold particles escape through a sieve on the tub, and these are

> caught by quicksilver spread all along the plates over which the dirty water runs. Then the amalgam is afterwards gathered from the tub and the plates, and the mercury is driven off by heat, leaving the pure gold. The mill can crush a ton of ore an hour, and each ton yields from twenty-five to forty dollars worth of gold. The expenses of extracting are about fifteen dollars a ton.[11]

About once a week, the power was shut off, and the rasp of metal against rock, the rush of water through tanks, the chuff of steam escaping from pistons stopped, and the men cleaning the tubs and screens of amalgam, after seven days of shouting pitched their curses low and soft against the sudden quiet. They worked carefully, for mills were required to run reasonably close to the assays of the ore they had crushed that week.

After all the amalgam had been gathered, it was squeezed through buckskin until it looked the color of cornmeal mush. This liquid metal was then poured into a little, bricklike mold whose every side was perforated with needle holes. The mold and contents were placed in a large box from which a pipe extended into a tub of water. When the box was sealed and heated, the quicksilver distilled and collected at the bottom of the tub of water, and the gold was left as a brick formed by the mold.

Christnott's mill piled up about $5500 in bricks each week, but at a $2500 milling expense, leaving only $3000 for the mining company. Out of this $3000 it had to pay the cost of mining, which averaged about $5 a ton, or $840 for a full seven days, leaving a net profit of $2160 for the week. The near-by mill on the Kearsarge lode was much more efficient, cleaning up $4000 a week against milling expenses of only $650.[12]

When Eastern speculators heard that Montana mills had bricks left over each week as profit, Virginia City mining men

had less trouble raising money (although one of the first mines to be worked by an Eastern joint-stock company, the Lucas, went broke when its vein—so rich a guard had to be kept on the ore dump—faulted out at sixty feet). But capturing outside capital did not cure all the ills that Alder Gulch quartz mining was heir to. Eastern capital too often meant Eastern management—bad management, according to Colonel McClure:

> . . . careful men . . . seem to lose sight of all sound business principles in projecting and directing mining operations 3,000 miles distant . . . In most cases, some son or friend of one of the leading officers of the company, having no fitness for business that is easily understood in the East, is sent out to enjoy fast horses, good liquors and cigars and speedily mismanages the company into debt and failure. . . .[13]

One such manager expended $250,000 on mill buildings and other structures, only to go broke before he could get around to mining.[14]

Another company, under the management of a "scientific professor," spent $5000 fencing a horse pasture.[15] These self-styled professors claimed to have special knowledge, processes all their own, for extracting all of the ore from the rock. Many of them hid any knowledge they had behind a mysterious, pseudo-scientific jargon, and made themselves indispensable by keeping their supposedly exclusive process a secret. One such professor, sick from inhaling mercury fumes, caused a mill to shut down because he was the only one who knew how to operate it. Honest mining men pleaded that the professors be sent down the road hand in hand with playboy favorite sons.

In spite of mismanagement, the mills produced gold, and yellow bricks of the stuff soon became a regular item on Wells-

Fargo bills of lading, and X. Beidler with his shotgun a regular rider on coaches from Montana to Utah. He rode the top of the coach, guarding the valuable treasure boxes, riding down one week and back the next, all for $250 a month. Usually, he was the only passenger, for most ticket purchasers were afraid to ride a coach carrying $120,000 in gold. They had reason to be wary, for, according to Beidler, "It always seemed that the heavier the treasure aboard the thicker the road agents, and it got so dangerous that the express companies decided to put on more messengers and guards." X. was glad for the company, until he saw the men assigned to him: Big Nick, whom X. suspected of being in with the road agents, and Frank Orr, "a brocky-faced thief."

Their first trip together, Big Nick suggested that if robbers should stop them in Dry Creek Canyon, where most holdups occurred, the smart thing to do would be to hand over the treasure. As reply, X. stuck his head out the window (he had just climbed inside after two days and two nights on top) and yelled at Tom, the driver, to whip up the team and let 'em run through the canyon. X. remembered that wild ride long afterward, when he wrote:

> The moon was near full and we rattled into Dry Creek on a good swinging trot. As we got into the creek, which was on both sides walled up with rocks and a natural place made especially for road agents, a man raised up from behind a rock and hollered "Halt!" I was head and shoulders out of the coach, shotgun in hand with eighteen buckshot to the barrel and powder enough to throw them. The road agent hadn't the word out of his mouth before he had eighteen buckshot buried in him, and I only had to shoot about ten feet. He fell backwards and both barrels of his shotgun went off as he was falling, and they looked like the smoke stacks of a steamboat. The smoke from my gun

blowed away and there stood my next man, another road agent. I shot him with my other load, hitting him just about the groins. He fell over, and during this time the other road agents on the left hand had fired. Frank Orr had fired one shot (I don't know what at), and "Big Nick" had also fired one shot from a needle gun from the inside. The firing had set the team on a dead run. My gun was empty and I got my revolver out, but we were out of range of the road agents. I looked around and found "Big Nick" was laying at the bottom of the coach, and the team was going at break-neck pace. I hollered to Tom Caldwell, the driver: "Are you hurt outside?" He said: "No. Are you hurt on the inside?" I told him I didn't know, as "Big Nick" was laying on the bottom of the coach. I asked Nick if he was hurt and he said "No" and laughed. I wanted to know what he was doing down there. He said he "was resting." I called him some pet names and told him we would never be in another fight together. We got to the Hole in the Rocks, eight miles, in quicker time than the Utah Northern ever made it since.[16]

X. could protect the stockholders from having their money taken by shotgun-toting men in masks, but he couldn't protect them from swindling mining men who closed good mines in "the freezeout game," a method of making money on a mine by not mining it. In this pastime, a sort of reverse blindman's buff, blindered Eastern investors were tagged out by the "its" in control of the company who, taking advantage of the stockholders' blindness, deliberately mined poor ore to close the mine. When the game was over, the company was broke, and the swindlers, who secretly bought up the depreciated stock, became operators of a developed mining property. The freezeout game was played frequently in Alder Gulch—whenever sufficient stockholders could be blindfolded—often enough that Colonel McClure warned Eastern

investors to beware of wearing blinders when playing mining games, saying, "any good mine in Montana that does not pay wants a change of management." [17] Unfortunately, spectators at such games, the merchants in Virginia City and the b'hoys who worked in the mines, were also hurt: as they watched, jobs disappeared and pay rolls dwindled.

Another complicated mining "game," involving the way in which mining claims were laid out, forced stockholders to pay through the nose to learn the rules to a new kind of hopscotch. The novice player, a greenhorn manager of a tenderfoot Eastern mining company, often discovered after he had erected a mill that he was in the middle of a hopscotch figure with no place to jump: his company's claims were hemmed in by other claims held by speculators who had been waiting for someone like him to come along—for he had to have their land to mine his ore inexpensively through a tunnel. If he jumped to those claims, he had to buy them at ruinous prices; if he stood still, he had to sink a shaft to his ore which would cost $20 a ton more than if he tunneled from these adjacent claims.[18] Either way he chose, his company was likely to be ruined.

These were the troubles that descended on Virginia City when she tried to turn from placer to quartz mining. But they didn't stop her from continuing to put on the airs of a Queen City, though her wealth had been shipped to foreign parts, and her subjects had mostly emigrated. But then, truly royal, she had never been much of a one to face facts: she had flung gold to the winds, boasting she was wealthy enough to pay premium wages, heedless that the b'hoys blew their pay for whisky and slept in alleys except when bad weather filled every hotel room in town with their wet misery. She was an adolescent Queen City whose escape from reality caused her to suffer from an adolescent disease, schizophrenia. Most properly, her citizens were called b'hoys.

When things looked blackest, she still believed she was the center of the gold-producing universe and that b'hoys who deserted to other camps had left the true faith. (Perhaps the frequent earthquakes which shook her were read to portend great things to come.) As late as the mid-seventies, when she was shipping only $15,000 in gold each week,[19] she sneered at the Black Hills rush, bragging that near-by Moose Creek had just produced a thirty-ounce nugget, scoffing, "And yet, some do run off to the Black Hills after the 'self-rising, yeast-powder, fly-float, gold,' said to be found down in the neighborhood of Custer City." [20]

This was the way those b'hoys whom Virginia City had given everything felt. They stuck with her and believed in her. Though the census figures of 1870 showed only 569 white people living in Virginia City and only 2054 people of the original 10,000 left in the county, they refused to consider all lost. Though the census further revealed only forty-seven miners living in town, and but 472 in the county (including 270 Chinese), they refused to believe the mines were gone. Though the town which had in 1865 gathered license fees from twenty-five hotels and eating places, seventy-three liquor dealers, three dance houses, and forty-eight manufacturers, in 1870 had only four hotels and one restaurant, eleven saloons, no dance houses, and twenty-six manufacturers to pay licenses, they still clung to their city charter of incorporation. Though only ten prostitutes (seven Chinese and three white—delicately listed as "mercanteel" in the census list) entertained the b'hoys, they still thought of the town as hell-roaring.[21]

The dreams of '63, when Captain S. S. Short had proudly erected the first log cabin in town to house his wife and children, giving the town its first air of permanence, seemed to be all up in 1866 when young Miller informed his diary, "Trade is nearly Played Out here. Virginia looks like a large

town minus—the people." [22] In 1867, when b'hoys anxious to get out of town took to raffling houses and furniture in order to realize something on them, the town seemed to be gasping its last. In 1868, when the *Montana Post* listed seventeen bankruptcies in one issue, sensible men would have packed up and left. In 1874, when once-proud blacksmiths were reduced to advertising they would take all kinds of produce in exchange for work, the town's pulse seemed about gone.[23] The departure of the capital in 1875 should have stopped it completely. Yet the town lived on.

To Helena b'hoys, looking down on their former home from their self-inflated heights, the dinky little former capital must have seemed like the amphibious axolotl which they had seen in the lakes just beyond the head of Alder Gulch: a remnant of a former age left isolated high in the mountains to die. But Virginia City, like the axolotl, thrived on isolation and high altitude, and also learned to breathe in strange environments: quartz mines and dredge boats—and (at present) crowds of summer tourists.

Of all the mining towns alive when Montana Territory was formed—Bannack, Bagdad, Pioneer, Summit, Highland, Central City, Adobetown, Nevada City, Junction City and others—only Virginia City still lives. Virginia City has never been a ghost town.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

Most of the story of the discovery of Alder Gulch gold in this chapter is taken from "The Journal of Henry Edgar" in Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana, *Volume III. Some incidents are from Peter Ronan's account as given in Tom Stout's* History of Montana.

[1] *Diary of John Grannis,* 1863-66.
[2] *Diary of James Henry Morley in Montana, 1862-65,* entries for March 8, 1864 and August 22, 1864.
[3] Letter to editor, *Montana Post,* April 22, 1865, p. 1.
[4] Morley, *op. cit.,* p. 117.
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 106.
[6] Henry N. Blake, "Historical Sketch of Madison County, Montana Territory," (Fourth of July Oration, 1876), *Montana Historical Society* Contributions, Vol. 2, p. 76.

CHAPTER 2

[1] Morley, *op. cit.,* p. 191.
[2] Blake, *op. cit.*

[3] *Diary of Isaac Rogers, Jan.-Dec., 1865, Virginia City, Montana Territory,* January 28, 1865.
[4] Estimated from the 1870 census lists and from the membership list of the Society of Montana Pioneers.
[5] Letter to the editor signed "W," *Montana Post,* Sept. 24, 1864, p. 4.
[6] Photocopy letter *Carswell written for Fraser to Mrs. Fraser,* August 21, 1864.
[7] *History of Madison County,* edited by Melvina J. Lott, (Virginia City material by Frances Albright and Eunice Holbert), p. 71.
[8] N. P. Langford, "Letter to James Wickes Taylor," *Montana Magazine of History,* Spring 1954, p. 15.
[9] *Montana Post,* May 13, 1865, p. 2.
[10] *Ibid.,* April 22, 1865, p. 3.

CHAPTER 3

[1] Grannis, *op. cit.,* December 26, 1864.
[2] Wilbur F. Sanders, "Sketches of Settlers," a typescript.
[3] Morley, *op. cit.,* January 22, 1863.

CHAPTER 4

[1] *An Act of Divine Providence,* by H. W. Sprague, printed by the author in 1924, p. 36.
[2] *Ibid.,* pp. 41-42.
[3] *X. Beidler, Vigilante,* edited by Helen F. Sanders and W. H. Bertsche, Jr., p. 67.
[4] From original in files of Montana State Historical Society Library.
[4a] Sanders and Bertsche, *op. cit.,* p. 33. On the other hand, Stinson is supposedly buried in Bannack. There is no marker for him in Virginia City's Boot Hill.
[5] Grannis, *op. cit.,* January 14, 1864.

[6] *Memoirs of a Frontier Woman,* by Margaret Ronan, p. 144.
[7] Morley, *op. cit.,* pp. 146 and 158.
[8] Photocopy letters of J. Blanchard to Reverend Milton Badger, D. D.
[9] *Montana Post,* Nov. 5, 1864, p. 3.
[10] *Ibid.,* Dec. 10, 1864, p. 1.
[11] *Ibid.,* August 18, 1866, p. 1.
[12] *Ibid.,* Sept. 23, 1865, p. 3.
[13] *Ibid.,* June 24, 1865, p. 3.
[14] *Ibid.,* March 24, 1866, p. 3.
[15] *Ibid.,* Dec. 2, 1865, p. 3.
[16] Estimated from newspaper and other accounts.
[17] *Montana Post,* March 2, 1867, p. 1.

CHAPTER 5

[1] Morley, *op. cit.,* p. 138.
[2] *Days on the Road,* by Sarah Raymond Herndon, p. 261.
[3] Letter to the editor, *Montana Post,* April 29, 1865, p. 1.
[4] Letter from Corporal Jack to the editor, *Montana Post,* Jan. 19, 1867, p. 4. The Corporal claimed he was a miner with fourteen years' experience from Chile to the Russian provinces.
[5] *Montana Post,* Dec. 9, 1865, p. 2.
[6] Typescript letter of Ed Morsman to M. J. Morsman, Jan. 20, 1865.
[7] Grannis, *op. cit.*
[8] L. L. Callaway, "Tales of Alder Gulch," *Montana Education,* February, 1931, p. 18.
[9] *Eighty-one Years in the West,* by G. A. Bruffey, p. 51.
[10] *Montana Post,* Oct. 15, 1864, p. 2; Sept. 22, 1866, p. 5; Jan. 5, 1867, p. 8; Jan. 19, 1867, p. 8; May 9, 1868, p. 7; May 22, 1868, p. 8; June 12, 1868, pp. 2, 8; March 5, 1869, p. 6.
[11] *Ibid.,* May 6, 1865, p. 3; June 17, 1865, p. 3; Bruffey, *op. cit.,* p. 51.
[12] *Montana Post,* Sept. 30, 1865, p. 2.

[13] *Ibid.*, May 18, 1867, p. 8.
[14] Clyde McLemore, "Virginia City in 1864," *Frontier and Midland,* Vol. 19, p. 131.
[15] Morley, *op. cit.*, pp. 102, 162, 202; McLemore, *op. cit.*, p. 130.
[16] Blake, *op. cit.*
[17] L. L. Callaway, "Comments on the Pamphlet 'From Historic Virginia City,' " March 24, 1947. In his comments, Callaway fears that perhaps those who placed the monument to the discoverers on Fairweather's claim may have erred in reporting Alder Gulch produced $100 million, and thinks that the claims of $200 million in this tourist promotion pamphlet preposterous.

CHAPTER 6

[1] *Montana Post,* Oct. 15, 1864, p. 3; Jan. 28, 1865, p. 3; March 11, 1865, p. 2.
[2] *Ibid.*, March 25, 1865, p. 2.
[3] *Ibid.*, Oct. 8, 1864, p. 3.
[4] *Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop*, by D. S. Tuttle, p. 133, p. 138.
[5] A. M. Hough, "Establishment of Our Mission in Montana. Notes from My Diary."
[6] Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 262.
[7] Letter of Correspondent Albert D. Richardson to the *New York Tribune,* reprinted in the *Montana Post,* March 10, 1866, p. 1 of supplement.
[8] Hough, *op. cit.*
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Rogers, *op. cit.*, Jan. 22, 1865.
[11] Tuttle, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
[12] Hough, *op. cit.*
[13] Tuttle, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
[14] *Madisonian,* June 22, 1876, p. 4.
[15] *History of Montana* (1885), p. 774.
[16] *Covered Wagon Days,* by A. J. Dickson, p. 170.

CHAPTER 7

[1] *Montana Post,* June 30, 1866, p. 3; Oct. 19, 1867, p. 8; June 29, 1867.
[2] Tuttle, *op. cit.,* p. 136.
[3] Langford, *op. cit.,* pp. 20-21.
[4] *Montana Post,* June 23, 1866, p. 3.
[5] *Ibid.,* June 30, 1866, p. 3.
[6] *Ibid.,* Oct. 22, 1864, p. 3.
[7] *Vigilante Days and Ways,* by N. P. Langford, p. 148.
[8] A. K. Eaton, "Notes on Montana," *Mineral Resources of the States and Territories West of the Rocky Mountains,* p. 139.

CHAPTER 8

[1] *Montana Post,* Oct. 29, 1864, p. 3.
[2] *American Humor,* by Constance Rourke, p. 166.
[3] *Montana Post,* March 2, 1867, p. 8.
[4] *Ibid.,* Dec. 28, 1867, p. 2.
[5] *Ibid.,* May 28, 1869, p. 8.
[6] *Montana Democrat,* March 21, 1868, p. 4.
[7] *Montana Post,* March 21, 1868, p. 8.
[8] *Ibid.,* Jan. 21, 1865, p. 3.
[9] *Montanian,* Sept. 7, 1871, p. 5.

CHAPTER 9

[1] *Montana Post,* Sept. 29, 1866, p. 5.
[2] *Ibid.,* March 10, 1866, p. 1, supplement.
[3] *Ibid.,* Sept. 22, 1866, p. 5.
[4] *Ibid.,* Sept. 17, 1864, p. 2.
[5] *Ibid.,* March 10, 1866, p. 1, supplement.
[6] *Ibid.,* August 25, 1866, p. 8.

[7] Morsman, *op. cit.*
[8] *Montana Post,* Oct. 27, 1866, p. 3; March 10, 1866, p. 1, supplement.
[9] *Ibid.,* Oct. 14, 1865, p. 2.
[10] Typescript letter of E. M. Morsman to John S. Collins, Sept. 26, 1904.
[11] *Acts, Resolutions and Memorials of the Territory of Montana, passed by the First Legislative Assembly, convened at Bannack, December 12, 1864.*
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] *Three Thousand Miles Through the Rockies,* by A. K. McClure, p. 311.
[14] *Montana Post,* July 15, 1865, p. 3.
[15] Wilbur F. Sanders, *Anaconda Standard,* Feb. 23, 1919.
[16] *From Wilderness to Statehood,* by J. M. Hamilton, p. 309.
[17] *Montana Post,* Jan. 7, 1865, p. 4; March 4, 1865, p. 3; March 18, 1865, p. 1.
[18] Letter to the editor signed "R. H.," *ibid.,* December 31, 1864, p. 3.
[19] *History of Montana,* by Tom Stout, p. 282.
[20] L. L. Callaway, *Cascade Courier,* May 9, 1930.
[21] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 10

[1] McLemore, *op. cit.,* p. 131.
[2] McClure, *op. cit.,* pp. 380-1.
[3] *Montana Post,* Oct. 29, 1864, p. 2.
[4] Langford, *op. cit., Montana Magazine of History,* Spring, 1954, p. 15.
[5] *Montana Post,* Oct. 8, 1864, p. 3.
[6] *Ibid.,* Feb. 4, 1865, p. 1.
[7] *Ibid.,* March 18, 1865, p. 1.
[8] *Ibid.,* March 4, 1865, p. 2; Feb. 18, 1865, p. 2.
[9] McClure, *op. cit.,* p. 385.
[10] *Madisonian,* Jan. 29, 1876, p. 3.

[11] *Montanian,* Feb. 26, 1874, p. 5.
[12] *Madisonian,* Feb. 14, 1874, p. 3.
[13] Callaway, *Montana Education,* March, 1931, p. 21.
[14] Hamilton, *op. cit.,* p. 339.
[15] *Madisonian,* Oct. 9, 1875, p. 3.
[16] Rogers, *op. cit.,* Feb. 6, 1865.
[17] Letter to the editor, *Montana Post,* March 18, 1865, p. 2.
[18] Letter from City Attorney, John C. Turk, *Montana Post,* March 11, 1865, p. 2.
[19] *Montana Post,* April 1, 1865, p. 2; May 27, 1865, p. 2.
[20] From the originals in the files of the Montana Historical Society Library.
[21] *Montana Post,* Feb. 2, 1867, p. 8.
[22] *History of Montana,* by Helen F. Sanders, p. 334; Hamilton, *op. cit.,* p. 293.
[23] *Montana Post,* Oct. 5, 1867, p. 8.
[24] *Montanian,* May 11, 1871, p. 2.
[25] *Montana Post,* May 20, 1865, p. 4; Jan. 20, 1866, p. 2.
[26] Morley, *op. cit.,* p. 171.

CHAPTER 11

Much of the material concerning General Meagher is from R. G. Athearn's excellent book, *Thomas Francis Meagher.*

[1] *Montana Post,* Oct. 22, 1864, p. 1.
[2] *Ibid.,* Oct. 1, 1864, p. 3.
[3] *Ibid.,* August 26, 1865, p. 3.
[4] *Ibid.,* Feb. 15, 1868, p. 4; August 24, 1867, p. 1.
[5] O. F. Goddard, "Reminiscences of W. F. Sanders."
[6] *Montana Post,* Oct. 7, 1865, p. 2.
[7] J. K. Miller, "My Diary (1864 to 1868—travels to Virginia City and later to Europe)," Jan. 29, 1867. Andrew F. Rolle has done an enjoyable and readable book of this diary, *The Road to Virginia City.*
[8] *Montana Post,* Feb. 3, 1866, p. 3; Sept. 21, 1867, p. 1.
[9] *Ibid.,* June 30, 1866, p. 3.

[10] *Ibid.,* Oct. 6, 1866, p. 5; Oct. 27, 1866, p. 2.
[11] Typescript letter from W. F. Sanders to J. E. Callaway, May 16, 1904.

CHAPTER 12

[1] Callaway, *Montana Education,* March, 1931, p. 20.
[2] Grannis, *op. cit.,* Winter, 1864.
[3] McClure, *op. cit.,* p. 390.
[4] *Montanian,* Feb. 12, 1876, p. 3.
[5] *Montana Post,* Dec. 2, 1865, p. 2.
[6] *Ibid.,* May 19, 1866, p. 2.
[7] Herndon, *op. cit.,* p. 262.
[8] McClure, *op. cit.,* p. 371.
[9] Hough, *op. cit.*
[10] Grannis, *op. cit.,* Feb., 1864.
[11] *Ibid.,* Feb. 7, 1863 to April 14, 1864, recurrent references to his marital troubles.
[12] Miller, *op. cit.,* Feb. 20, 1866.
[13] *Vigilantes of Montana,* by Thomas J. Dimsdale, p. 79.

CHAPTER 13

[1] *Montana Post,* Sept. 14, 1867, p. 4.
[2] McLemore, *op. cit.,* p. 132.
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 130.
[4] *Montana Post,* Sept. 14, 1867, p. 4.
[5] Morley, *op. cit.,* p. 191.
[6] Miller, *op. cit.,* Sept. 22, 1865; *Montana Post,* June 23, 1866, p. 3.
[7] Samuel Leach, "Excerpts from the Autobiography of Samuel Leach," typescript.
[8] *Montana Post,* Nov. 17, 1866, p. 5.
[9] *Ibid.,* Dec. 9, 1865, p. 3. Amounts calculated from market report given in this issue.

[10] *Ibid.,* June 10, 1865, p. 3; Tuttle, *op. cit.,* p. 132; McLemore, *op. cit.,* p. 132.
[11] *Montana Post,* March 25, 1865, p. 2.
[12] *Ibid.,* Nov. 12, 1864, p. 3.
[13] Typescript letter of I. I. Moore to Col. J. H. Moore, Sept. 14, 1866.
[14] *Forty Years on the Frontier,* by Granville Stuart, p. 27.
[15] Carswell, *op. cit.*
[16] *Montana Post,* June 10, 1865, p. 2.
[17] *Ibid.,* Sept. 14, 1867, p. 4.
[18] *Ibid.,* March 25, 1865, p. 2.
[19] Morsman letter to Morsman, *op. cit.*
[20] Miller, *op. cit.,* Sept. 30, 1865; July 18, 1866; January 1, 1867; May 27, 1867.
[21] *Montana Post,* April 22, 1865, p. 2.
[22] Account book of E. W. McVeal.

CHAPTER 14

[1] *Montana Post,* Sept. 9, 1865, p. 3. Assuming that the Oliver & Co. fare had been at least as high as the old fare given here.
[2] Tom Baker's Account Book for Oliver & Co.
[3] An estimate: Morley, *op. cit.,* p. 206, noted that it cost $600 to $800 to return to the States in 1865; according to Leach, *op. cit.,* $375 was the fare to Denver in 1867; the *Montana Post,* April 28, 1866, p. 3, says the fare from Salt Lake City to Atchison was $250.
[4] Granville Stuart's letter to the editor, *Montana Post,* Jan. 5, 1867, p. 4. Stuart speaks as though Holladay was still operating the line.
[5] *Montanian,* April 22, 1875, p. 5.
[6] *Montana Post,* Oct. 22, 1864, p. 1.
[7] Leach, *op. cit.*
[8] *Missouri-Montana Highways,* by H. A. Trexler, p. 33.
[9] McClure, *op. cit.,* p. 428.

[10] Letter to editor from "S. F. D.," *Montana Post,* March 16, 1867, p. 1.
[11] *Montana Post,* March 3, 1866, p. 1; May 5, 1866, p. 3; May 19, 1866, p. 3; Nov. 24, 1866, p. 5.
[12] *Ibid.,* Oct. 29, 1864, p. 3.
[13] *Ibid.,* April 20, 1867, p. 8.
[14] *Ibid.,* April 1, 1865, p. 3.
[15] *Ibid.,* Feb. 16, 1867, p. 1.
[16] *Ibid.,* March 2, 1867, p. 8; Oct. 12, 1867, p. 8; Oct. 19, 1867, p. 8.
[17] *Madisonian,* April 26, 1877, p. 3.
[18] *Montanian,* Dec. 19, 1872, p. 5; *Madisonian,* Feb. 22, 1877, p. 3; May 24, 1877, p. 3.

CHAPTER 15

[1] *Montana Post,* April 20, 1867, p. 8.
[2] Blanchard, *op. cit.*
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Ronan, *op. cit.,* p. 46.
[5] Hough, *op. cit.*
[6] *Ibid.; Montana Post,* March 10, 1866, p. 1, supplement.
[7] Miller, *op. cit.,* April 7, 1867.
[8] Tuttle, *op. cit.,* pp. 185 and 192.
[9] *Ibid.,* p. 172.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Montana Post,* Nov. 12, 1864, p. 2.
[12] Dimsdale, *op. cit.,* p. 12.
[13] Montana Post, Jan. 14, 1865, p. 2.
[14] *Ibid.,* Sept. 22, 1866, p. 5.
[15] *Ibid.,* Dec. 22, 1866, p. 8.
[16] *Ibid.,* May 12, 1866, p. 3.
[17] *Ibid.,* March 28, 1868, p. 8.
[18] *Ibid.,* Feb. 2, 1867, p. 8.
[19] *Montana Democrat,* April 18, 1868, p. 3.
[20] *Madisonian,* March 25, 1876, p. 3; May 1, 1875, p. 3.

[21] *Ibid.*, May 25, 1876, p. 3.
[22] Tuttle, *op. cit.*, pp. 172 and 175.
[23] *Montanian,* April 22, 1875, p. 5.

CHAPTER 16

[1] *Montana Post,* Oct. 1, 1864, p. 3.
[2] *Ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1864, p. 3.
[3] *Ibid.*, Jan. 7, 1865, p. 1.
[4] *Ibid.*, Feb. 18, 1865, p. 2.
[5] *Ibid.*, Jan. 21, 1865, p. 3.
[6] *Ibid.*, June 29, 1867, p. 4.
[7] *Ibid.*, Nov. 26, 1864, p. 3.
[8] *Ibid.*, Feb. 3, 1866, p. 3.
[9] *Ibid.*, March 10, 1866, p. 1, supplement.
[10] *Ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1866, p. 3.
[11] *Ibid.*, Sept. 7, 1867, p. 8.
[12] *Ibid.*, Sept. 21, 1867, p. 8.
[13] *Ibid.*, March 17, 1866, p. 3.
[14] *Ibid.*, Dec. 17, 1864, p. 3.
[15] *Ibid.*, March 10, 1866, p. 1, supplement.
[16] Miller, *op. cit.*, Sept. 17, 1865.
[17] *Montana Margins,* ed. by J. K. Howard, p. 363.

CHAPTER 17

[1] *Montana Post,* Feb. 10, 1866, p. 2.
[2] *Montanian,* Dec. 26, 1872, p. 5.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, Dec. 19, 1872, p. 4.
[5] *Ibid.*, Jan. 30, 1873, p. 5.
[6] *Montana Post,* Sept. 29, 1866, p. 5.
[7] *Ibid.*, Jan. 25, 1868, p. 8.
[8] *Montanian,* Nov. 13, 1873, p. 8.
[9] *Montana Post,* June 3, 1865, p. 2.

[10] *Montanian,* Nov. 7, 1872, p. 5.
[11] *Ibid.,* August 31, 1871, p. 5; March 27, 1873, p. 5; June 12, 1873, p. 5.
[12] From the 1870 census figures.
[13] *Montana Post,* Nov. 3, 1866, p. 5.
[14] Tuttle, *op. cit.,* p. 170.
[15] *Montana Radiator,* Jan. 27, 1866, p. 3.
[16] *Madisonian,* March 8, 1876, p. 3.
[17] *Ibid.,* Jan. 8, 1876, p. 3.
[18] *Montana Post,* March 21, 1868, p. 8.
[19] *Montanian,* April 27, 1871, p. 5.
[20] *Montana Post,* Jan. 26, 1867, p. 8.
[21] *Madisonian,* Oct. 9, 1875, p. 3.
[22] *Montanian,* Dec. 21, 1871, p. 7.

CHAPTER 18

[1] *Montana Post,* April 6, 1867, p. 8.
[2] Ronan, *op. cit.,* p. 55.
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 58.
[4] *Madisonian,* April 5, 1877, p. 3.
[5] *Montana Post,* April 13, 1867, p. 8.
[6] *Ibid.,* Sept. 17, 1864, p. 2.
[7] *Ibid.,* March 11, 1865, p. 2.

CHAPTER 19

[1] *Montana Post,* Oct. 7, 1865, p. 1.
[2] *Ibid.,* Jan. 13, 1866, p. 2; Feb. 24, 1866, p. 3; April 7, 1866, p. 3.
[3] Hamilton, *op. cit.,* p. 146.
[4] Trexler, *op. cit.,* p. 10.
[5] Estimated according to the fares given later in the chapter.
[6] *Montana Post,* June 30, 1866, p. 1.
[7] *Ibid.,* May 2, 1868, p. 7. These figures are not necessarily

standard prices. Fare varied from boat to boat and season to season. Incidentally, freight was only 6¢ a pound this season.

[8] *Ibid.*, April 29, 1865, p. 1.
[9] *Ibid.*, Oct. 22, 1864, p. 3.
[10] Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 179.
[11] Carswell, *op. cit.*
[12] *Montana Post,* Sept. 2, 1865, p. 2.
[13] *Ibid.*, June 16, 1866, p. 3.
[14] *Ibid.*, August 26, 1865, p. 2; Feb. 10, 1866, p. 3.
[15] *Ibid.*, August 11, 1866, p. 3.
[16] *Ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1866, p. 5.
[17] *Ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1866, p. 1.
[18] *Madisonian,* Feb. 5, 1876, p. 3.

CHAPTER 20

[1] McLemore, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Montana Post,* June 17, 1865, p. 2; Nov. 25, 1865, p. 2; *Statistics of Mines and Mining in the States and Territories West of the Rocky Mountains,* by Rossiter W. Raymond, pp. 302-305.
[4] *Montana Post,* Feb. 18, 1865, p. 2.
[5] *Anaconda Standard,* March 12, 1917.
[6] *Montana Post,* Sept. 8, 1866, p. 2.
[7] *Ibid.*, April 8, 1865, p. 3.
[8] Carswell, *op. cit.*
[9] *Montana Post,* Oct. 12, 1867, p. 2.
[10] *Ibid.*, July 17, 1868, p. 5.
[11] Tuttle, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
[12] *Montana Post,* Feb. 23, 1867, p. 8.
[13] *Ibid.*, Sept. 14, 1867, p. 4.
[14] *Montanian,* Oct. 26, 1871, p. 2.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Lott, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 184.
[17] *Montana Post,* Oct. 12, 1867, p. 2.
[18] *Ibid.*, Sept. 14, 1867, p. 4.

[19] *Madisonian,* Oct. 16, 1875, p. 3.
[20] *Ibid.,* May 18, 1876, p. 3.
[21] Census of 1870, *op. cit.; Montana Post,* March 18, 1865, p. 2.
[22] Sprague, *op. cit.,* p. 29; Miller, *op. cit.,* June 8, 1866.
[23] *Montana Post,* Sept. 14, 1867, p. 8; *Flour and Wheat in Montana Gold Camps,* by H. A. Trexler, p. 9; *Montanian,* Feb. 26, 1874, p. 3.

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Most of the material in this book has been found in several readings of Virginia City's *Montana Post,* an excellent mining-camp newspaper, filled with facts instead of the usual frontier froth. It was first published in 1864 and suspended in 1869 after moving to Helena.

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INDEX

Adobetown, 17
Alberta, Major, 103
Alder Creek, 7, 16, 17, 18, 46, 62, 156, 258, 259
Alder Gulch, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16 *ff.*, 26, 27, 31, 33, 113, 170, 271; dancing school in, 153-154; districts of, 7-8; free enterprise in, 81-90; gold removed from, 55-67; quartz mining in, 177, 271-282; Vigilance Committee formed in, 44; *see also* Virginia City
Allen and Millard's bank, 75, 116
Allman, John, 192-193
Anderson, R., 117
Arcade Saloon, 71, 173, 253
Argenta, 111, 171
Armitage, Jess, 81, 154
Arrastra, 277
Ashley, James M., 16, 118
Atchison, 108, 187, 265

Bagg, Charles S., 39
Bannack City, 3, 5-6, 12, 14, 16, 21, 24, 26, 31, 41, 118, 121, 124; government moved from, to Virginia City, 126; outlaws executed in, 47; Plummer's gang in, 28-30; Rockfellow's branch store in, 171; stagecoach to and from, 185
Bannack-Virginia City Road, 31
Barton Gulch, 271
Bean, Joe, 219
Beaver Canyon, 179
Beaverhead County, 123, 124
Beaverhead River, 2, 253, 258, 270
Beidler, X., 42, 98-99, 100, 136, 217, 248, 280; quoted, 280-281
Bennett, A. J., 120
Big Hole Bridge Company, 116
Big Hole River, 116
Big Horn Mountains, 114
Big Nick, 280
Billiard Parlor, Virginia City, 69
Bissell, G. G., 8, 12
Bitterroot Valley, 117
Bivin's Gulch, 66, 271
Blackfoot Creek, 87, 88, 171
Blackfoot Indians, 148
Blake, Henry, 12, 18, 65, 67, 147, 196
Blanchard, J., 199
Blay, William, challenge by, 206-207
Blunt, C. W., 215

Boxing matches, Virginia City, 216-222
Bozeman, John, 114, 115, 148
Bradbury, Charles, 256
Bridger, Jim, 114, 115
Brod, Old, 81, 256
Brown, execution of, 46
Brown's Gulch, 64, 66, 271
Bull Fight, Mexican (1864), 213
Burch, Clark and Co., 205
Burlingame Treaty, 244
Bustles, women's, 163-166
Byam, Don L., 39, 40, 42, 43

California Exchange Saloon, 75
Callaway, L. L., 67
Carrhart, 29
Carter, Alex, 43, 45
Castner, Mayor, 134
Caven, Buzz, 32
Caven, Mrs. Buzz, 226, 228
Cemetery Hill, Virginia City, 70
Central District, 10, 17
Champion Saloon, 70, 73, 127, 143
Chicago House, Virginia City, 71
Chinese, in Virginia City, 20, 212, 232-245, 250-251
Chouteau County, 123, 124, 135
Christnott's mill, 277, 278
Chumasero, William, 146
Claim-jumping, 9-10
Clark, Ed, 226
Claseby House, 70
Cleveland, Jack, 30, 35
Clipperton, O. W., 227
Colorado River, 264
Columbia River, 15, 107, 193
Content Corner, 68, 70, 83, 129, 147
Content's Store, 69, 126
Continental Divide, 15, 113
Corinne, Utah, 111, 115, 118, 188
Couldocks, 226, 227, 228, 229
Cover, Thomas, 2, 5, 66
Cowan, David, 100, 102, 103; verses by, 101, 102
Creighton, John, 42, 195, 196
Crow Indians, 1, 2

Dakota Territory, 107
Dance, Walter B., 117, 259, 260
Dance and Stuart, 28, 169, 182
Dance halls, Virginia City, 207-209
Dancing school, Alder Gulch, 153-154
Davis, Jeff, 13, 22, 23, 123
Daylight Creek, 12, 16, 17, 18, 62, 69, 74, 258
Daylight Gulch, 17, 256
Deer Lodge, 35, 45, 97, 123, 124, 130
Dempsey's Cottonwood Ranch, 28, 32, 46
Denver, 107, 109, 167, 173, 174
Deyarmon, Tom, 163, 196
Dillingham, 33, 47
Dimsdale, Thomas J., 24, 123, 144, 179, 214, 221, 222, 225, 254, 255; character of, 138-139; as editor of *Montana Post*, 139-141, 156, 179; on quartz prospecting, 272-273, 274; quoted, 78, 80, 156, 160, 173-174, 182; singing school conducted by, 154; theater lauded by, 223-224, 229-230; *Vigilantes of Montana* written by, 139
Donner's Pass, 14
Dorris, George P., 16
Douglass, Belle, 227
Drake's Plantation Bitters, 256
Driggs, "Yankee," 215
Duncan, Hugh, 202
Dwyer, Billy, 222

Edgar, Henry, 2, 5, 7, 8; gold discovered by, 3, 4
Edgerton, Sidney, 15, 16, 20, 21, 23, 32, 120, 123, 124, 126, 127, 141, 144, 260
Egnell's stagecoach line, 185
El Sol Saloon, 99
Elephant Corral, 50, 69, 249
Ezekiel, B., 130

Fairweather, Bill, 2, 6, 7, 11, 50, 65, 67, 185, 256; gold discovered by, 3-4, 5
Fairweather Mining District, 7, 8, 12, 32
Fenian Society, 24
Fergus, James, 8
Fetterman massacre, 114
Fiske, Captain, 188
Flint Creek, 12
"Flour riots," 181-182
Forbes, Charlie, 33, 34
Fort Benton, 14, 107, 110, 111, 112, 148, 149, 150, 259, 261, 262, 263, 264, 266
Fort Galpin, 260
Fort Hall, 14
Fort Sheridan, 262
Franck, Long John, 37, 38, 41, 43, 44
Freight, conveyed to Virginia City, 107-113

Gallagher, Jack, 33, 35, 48, 49, 249 and *n.*
Gallatin County, 132
Gallatin Valley, 148, 167, 193, 258
Gem Reading Room, 69
Gem Saloon, 69, 75, 220
Gernhart, W. F., 206
Gibson, 52
Gilbert, W. S., 134
Gilbert's Brewery, 82
Giorda, Joseph, 200
Gohn, George, 134
Gold dust, as medium of exchange, 171-175, 177
Goodrich's Saloon, 29
Granite Creek, 7, 17, 66
Grannis, John, 9, 13, 49, 154, 159
Grant, Johnnie, 14
Grasshopper Creek, 6, 14, 28
Graves, Whisky Bill, 28, 45
Greenbacks, used in Virginia City, 175-176, 177
Grim, Sim, 206
Gurney and Company, 168

Hall, Amos, 152, 153
Hammond, Dan, 242
Harper's Magazine, 143
Hastings, miners fooled by, 103
Hauser, Samuel T., 134, 260
Hayne, Julia Deane, 227
Helena, 78, 88, 130, 132, 184, 202, 267, 273, 284; as capital city, 132; stagecoach to and from, 187, 189, 193; telegraph line to, 196
Helena Herald, 141
Helena Independent, quoted, 131
Hell Gate, 14, 49, 193
Helm, Boone, 48, 49
Hermit of Daylight Gulch, 256
Higgins and Haggedorn, 170
Highland District, 7, 10, 17, 53, 109, 153
Hilderman, George, 37, 38, 44
Holladay, Ben, 186, 187, 188, 189, 265
Holter, Anton, 31, 69, 86
Hosmer, Judge, 51, 52, 93, 94, 126
Hough, A. M., 74, 77, 201, 202; quoted, 76, 158
Howe, John, 71, 95
Howie, Neil, 179

Hughes, Barney, 2, 5, 7, 67
Humboldt River, 14
Hunter, Bill, 28, 48, 49, 53
Hynson, George, 220

Idaho Billiard Saloon, 175
Idaho Hotel, 69, 126, 127
Idaho Statutes, 106
Idaho Street, in Virginia City, 70, 71
Idaho Territory, 1, 5, 6, 11, 14, 15, 16, 26, 106 *ff.*, 133
Independent, Helena, quoted, 131
Ives, George, 27, 28, 29, 31, 32, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42; execution of, 43-44

Jackson Street, in Virginia City, 70, 71, 72, 205
Jefferson County, 123, 124
Jefferson River, 100, 118, 258
Johnson, Andrew, 143, 147
Johnson, Leander W., 52
Johnston, Dick, 226
Judd, 99, 100
Junction Mining District, 8, 17, 39, 131-132, 170

Kearsarge lode, 278
Kennet lode, 97
Kensler, Toussaint, 116
Kercheval City, 260, 261

LaBarge, Captain, 223
Lane, Club Foot George, 28, 38, 48, 249
Langford, N. P., 22, 123, 134, 260
Langrishe, Jack, 100, 227, 228, 229, 230-231
Last Chance Gulch, 88, 169, 202, 273, 274
Leviathon Hall, 181, 182, 219, 220, 222
Lewis, W. H., 149
Lewiston, Idaho, 15, 106
Lincoln, Abraham, 16, 22, 23, 226
Literary and Debating Society, 142
Lorrain, John Baptist, 116, 117
Los Angeles, 107
Lott, John S., 44, 45
Lyon, Hays (Haze), 28, 33, 34, 48

McCarthy's Express, 186
McClellan Gulch, 88
McClure, Colonel, 117, 190, 281; quoted, 122, 125, 154, 158, 169, 176, 279
McClurg, J. E., 138
McFadden, "Bummer Dan," 32
McVeal, E. W., 182
Madison County, 118, 123, 124, 131, 132, 272
Madison River, 62, 78, 258
Madisonian, 104, 256; quoted, 131, 157, 161, 163, 164, 165, 196-197
Magruder, Lloyd, 109
Maguire, John, 198
Mammoth, the (gaming house), 205
Mannheim's Brewery, 20, 71, 82, 210
Marias River, 260
Marley, Patsy, 217
Martin, James, 223
Masonic Hall, 171
Masons, 45
Meagher, Thomas Francis, 117, 125, 126, 143, 144, 145, 151; enmities incurred by, 145, 146, 147; errors made by, 145-146; as military adventurer, 148-149; opposed by Sanders, 145, 146-147, 151; and report of jump into river, 150

Meagher County, 132
Melodeon Saloon, 127, 222, 224, 227
Mercury, in amalgam with gold, 61
Mexican Bull Fight (1864), 213
Miller, Jim, 86, 177-178, 227, 230, 283
Miner's Ten Commandments, 88
Mississippi River, 258
Missoula County, 124
"Missouri Admiration Society," 128
Missouri River, 2, 14, 15, 108, 111, 192, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 264, 266, 269
Monida Pass, 113, 191
Montana Democrat, 141, 255; quoted, 101
Montana Post, 61, 64, 65, 67, 69, 73, 75, 76, 83, 85, 86, 87, 93, 118, 119, 124, 125, 284; Blake as editor of, 147, 196; Chinese ridiculed by, 238; dance halls attacked by, 208-209; Dimsdale as editor of, 139-141, 156, 179; on flour prices, 179, 180, 181, 182; plays reviewed by, 228-230, 231; quoted, 21, 23, 51, 71, 96, 97, 108, 137, 162, 182, 194, 213, 228; telegraphic service to, 196
Montana Territory, 16, 89, 119, 120, 143, 274, 275; stagecoach lines in, 184-195; tax collections in, 135
Montana Theater, 223
Montanian, 255; quoted, 154-155, 161, 164, 165, 166, 231, 239
Moore, Isaac, 174
Moore, William, 28, 29, 35
Moose Creek, 283
Morley, James, 50, 58, 59, 259; quoted, 54-55, 106, 137
Muleskinner, 109
Mullan Road, 107, 117, 118, 119, 193
Mulqueen, John, 200
Munson, Judge, 146
Murat, "Count," 173-174
Musselshell River, 260, 261

Nelson, A. J., 219, 220
Nelson Gulch, 65
Nevada City District, 8, 16, 17, 21, 37, 38, 39, 64, 82, 88, 129, 169, 171, 179, 200, 270
New Orleans, 262
Nichols, Dr., 96
Nick, Big, 280
"Nightherd," 94-100, 102-105, 142, 156
Northern Pacific Railroad, 270
Norwood, William, 226, 228

Octoroon, The, Hosmer's, 94
Ohio River, 259
Ohlenhausen and Co., 169
Old Brod, 81, 256
Oliver, A. J., 84, 187, 192
Oliver and Company, 27, 87, 184, 185, 186, 189, 193
Omaha, 268
O'Neil, Hugh, 69, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222
Ophir, 260
Oregon Territory, 14, 107
Oregon Trail, 14, 113, 114, 115
Orem, Con, 70, 81, 127, 140, 217, 222, 224, 227; in boxing match with O'Neil, 69, 218-221
Orr, Frank, 280
Orr, Sample, 244
Overland Stage Line, 186, 188, 189

Pacific Railroad, 107
Palmer, William, 37, 38

Parish, Frank, 28, 48
Paunceforth, George, 227, 228
Peabody and Caldwell, 185
People's Theater, 75, 226, 227, 228, 251
Pfouts, Paris S., 25, 45, 48, 133, 182
Pfouts and Behm, 182
Pfouts and Russell, 168, 169
Pine Grove District, 7, 17
Ping Chong, 187
Pizanthia, 47
Plank-walking, 215
Planter's House, 71, 77, 126, 129, 144, 171
Plummer, Henry, 26-35 *passim*, 38, 39, 40, 46, 253; execution of, 47
Pony Saloon, 128, 173
Potts, Governor, 132
Price, Sterling, 122
Prickly Pear, 10, 23, 185
"Pumpkin pilers," 56

Quartz mining, 177, 271-282

Ramshorn Creek, 28
Ramshorn Gulch, 66, 271
Ramshorn Mountains, 37
Rattlesnake Ranch, 28, 46
Rattlesnake River, 2, 6
Ray, Ned, 28, 33, 47
Raymond, Sarah, 157
Reeves, Charlie, 29, 35
Reid, Lemuel, 9
Riley, Joe, 219
River transportation, 258-270
Rockfellow, John S., 70, 76, 86, 111, 127, 133, 169, 171, 175, 178, 179
Rockfellow and Dennee, 169, 182
Rocky Mountain Gazette, 141
Rodgers, Harry, 2, 4, 5
Rogers, Isaac, 92
Romey, Lucien, 82, 134
Ronan, Peter, 200
Rourke, Constance, 94
Ruby Canyon, 120
Ruby Mountains, 78, 253
Ruby River, 63, 258

Sacramento, 107, 192
St. Joseph, 108, 112
St. Louis, 259, 261
Salmon, Idaho, gold strike at, 191-192
Salt Lake City, 15, 16, 24, 109, 112, 114, 178, 216, 264; stagecoach to and from, 185, 186, 188, 191, 192, 269; and telegraph line, 195
Salt Lake Road, 119, 180
Salt Lake Vedette, 221
San Francisco, 107
Sanders, W. A., 71
Sanders, W. F., 32, 33, 38-45 *passim*, 118, 121, 125, 130, 150, 195; as Dimsdale's friend, 141, 142; Meagher opposed by, 145, 146-147, 151; stagecoach used by, 187, 189
Sawyer, Captain, 113, 170
Scheffler's Brewery, 82
Senate Saloon, 188
Shades Saloon, 222
Shebang Saloon, 215
Sheehan, Mollie, 200, 248, 249, 250, 252
Sheppard, Billy, 226, 227
Sherman, William T., 148, 149
Short, S. S., 283
Silver Bow, 88, 186
Silver City, 186
Simmons, Lew, 2
Sioux Territory, 113, 268
Skaggs, Anna, 32
Skinner, Cyrus, 28
Slade, J. A., 50, 249, 250

Smith, A. M., 81
Smith, Green Clay, 147, 149, 150, 222
Society of Montana Pioneers, 120
Soda Springs, 14, 113
South Cheyenne River, 113
Spivey, Henry, 41
Stagecoach lines, 184-195
Star Restaurant, 20, 70
Steele, F. R., 271
Steele, William, 8
Stein, Nat, 186, 225
Stinkingwater River, 2, 27, 46, 63, 84, 253
Stinkingwater Road, 31
Stinson, Buck, 29, 33, 34, 47
Stonewall Hall, 69, 81, 93, 127, 143, 215
Stuart, Granville, 175, 180, 187
Stuart, James, 2
Stubbs, Moses, 81
Summit District, 7-8, 83, 109, 116, 118, 131, 153, 158, 182, 202, 277
Sweeney, Mike, 2, 4, 5

Tbalt, Nicholas, 37, 38, 41, 42, 44
Telegraph line, to Virginia City, 195-197
"Telephone, whispering," 197
Theater, in Virginia City, 75, 223-231
Tilton, 76, 127, 134
Tobacco Root Mountains, 1, 2, 38, 271
Todd, George, 197
Toll roads, 116, 118, 119, 120
Tongue River, 113
Tootle and Leach, 71, 169, 182
Torbett, A. M., 199
Tribune, New York, 117; quoted, 224
Trowbridge, Charles, 128
Truckee River, 107
Trumbull, Lyman, 146
Tufts, James, 274
Tuttle, Bishop, 74, 76, 85, 102, 103, 203-205, 207, 229, 241; quoted, 77, 203, 204, 211-212, 277-278

Union Pacific Railroad, 115

Varina City, 12
Vedette, Salt Lake, 221
Vigilantes, 44-53, 146, 248, 249
Vigilantes of Montana, Dimsdale's, 139
Virginia City, 14, 15, 16, 17, 32, 65, 126, 284; boxing matches in, 216-222; as capital of Montana, 124, 126-132; children of, 246, 250-257; Chinese community in, 20, 212, 232-245, 250-251; churches in, 199-203; craftsmen of, 82, 83, 84; dancing as pastime in, 153, 154, 207-208; description of, 68-80; divorce rate in, 158, 159; drunkenness in, 204-205, 209, 210-211, 212; fire hazard in, 135, 136; "flour riots" in, 181-182; freight conveyed to, 107-113; gambling in, 205-207; gold dust used as money in, 171-175, 177; greenbacks used in, 175-176, 177; incorporation charter as political issue in, 133-134, 135; lawyers in, 38; merchant-speculators in, 167-171, 173, 179; named by Bissell, 12-13; "Nightherd" in, 94-100, 102-105, 142, 156; outlaws executed in, 48-49; Plummer's gang in, 33; political activity in, 122-137; population of, 18-20, 24,

170, 202; post-Civil War animosities in, 21-24, 122-123, 125; prices and wages in, 85-88; prostitution in, 211; social life of, 153-156; stagecoach to and from, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 190, 193, 194, 195; Sunday in, 198 *ff.*, 202, 207; tax issues in, 133-135, 136-137; telegraph line to, 195-197; theater in, 75, 223-231; and toll road to Summit, 116, 118; wages and prices in, 85-88; during winter, 91-93, 153, 176-177, 209; women employed in, 156-157; women's fashions in, 160-166; *see also* Alder Gulch
Virginia City Post, quoted, 173-174
Virginia City Telegraph Association, 197
Virginia City Water Company, 62
Virginia City Water Ditch Company, 63

Wagner, Dutch John, 47
Walla Walla, 14, 109, 111
Wallace Street, in Virginia City, 16, 17, 48, 68, 69, 72, 83, 99, 113, 122, 127, 129, 211, 214, 246, 247
Ward, Professor, 82
Washington, D.C., 15, 16, 21, 145, 146
Water transportation, 258-270
Waugh, DeWitt, 81, 220, 223, 225, 226, 229
Wells Fargo Company, 189
Welsh, James P., 206, 207
Western Union Company, 195
White, C. W., 82
White, John, 6
White Pine Lumber Company, 31, 69
Wigwam Creek, 131
William's Gulch, 271
Williams, James, 40, 44, 45, 46, 49
Wilson, Charles, 52
Wilson, Judge, 39, 40

Yaeger, Red, 45, 46, 49
Yellowstone valley, 1, 2, 79, 113, 114, 259, 266, 267, 268, 270