

GLITTERING GOLD.

A Remarkable Story as Told Us by Mr. John Lepley, Of Early Prospecting and Discoveries in the Bear's Paw Region.

While talking about the Indian reservation, a few days ago, in a group of three or four persons, John Lepley, the cattle king of the Big Sag, being one of the number, the matter of the probability of striking rich diggings in the Bear's Paw came up, when Mr. Lepley turned to the reporter and said:

"I want to say to you that there will be a big stampede into that country, and some bonanza placer mines are certain to be found. I base this opinion upon personal knowledge of an event that came very near turning the course of my career in Montana, or rather of winding up my career before I had passed the pilgrim period in the territory. When I have told my story you will understand why I predict a stampede to the Bear's Paw as well as my belief in rich diggings in that region."

MR. LEPLEY'S STORY.

In 1864 a prospector named Chris. Keyes and myself, as partners, discovered the first gold in Lewis and Clarke county, on Silver creek. We did not strike it very rich, but could make six or seven dollars a day very easily. We worked away for some time at this slow rate. I thought we were doing pretty well, but Keyes became impatient and wanted to move on in search of something better. He carried in his pocket at that time three small nuggets of gold that he picked up in the valleys of the Bear's Paw two years prior (while engaged in hunting for the fur company at Fort Benton), and his constant talk, night and day, was about prospecting these mountains, expressing his utmost faith in finding rich diggings. I advised him, however, to stick to what he had, and, to tell the truth, I was not very anxious to invade the Indian country at that time, the country down here being then alive with hostile red men. Keyes was too restless to remain on Silver creek, however, and leaving me in charge of the work he started along the main range towards the head of the Magias on a prospecting tour, with the understanding that we were to share equally in whatever he found.

After some months he returned, more down-hearted than ever, and now fully resolved to no longer delay his trip to the tempting Bear's Paw country and all his persuasive powers were tried to induce me to accompany him. But it was in vain. I thought too much of my scalp to take the risk. He then decided to go alone. I was to stay on Silver creek, and if he struck anything big I was to join him and share in the profits, and I never saw a man so imbued with confidence and with such implicit faith in the successful issue of his undertaking.

In February, 1865, we shook hands, Keyes starting for Fort Benton, en route to what he believed was a glittering gold field, while I remained in the gulch, content to earn my six and seven dollars a day. We had been partners about a year then, and I had learned to esteem Keyes highly. I was new at the business of prospecting and mining and had to rely much upon him—a reliance that was never misplaced. I placed great confidence in his judgment, and when he said—the last words he ever spoke to me—"I will not send for you unless I find something big," I knew that he would not.

Well, he came on to Fort Benton, and after securing such an outfit here as he needed, left for the Bear's Paw, and it was several months before I heard a word from him. Then came the message:

"Drop everything and come on. You don't want any horses or money; we can get all of the latter that we can carry. Come quick."

This was enough to make the blood boil in the veins of a gold hunter, and my first impulse was, indeed, to "drop everything" and strike out. Meantime, however, our diggings had become of some value and others had come into the camp. I talked the matter over with my comrades, who united in their efforts to dissuade me from going, representing that the country was held by hostile Indians, and that no matter how rich the diggings should prove they could not be worked. The Indians would not allow it, and it was simply certain death to go there. This kind of talk, kept up for about twenty-four hours, caused me to weaken, and I sent word to Keyes that I would not go. It was a fortunate decision for me, as the

SEQUEL

will conclusively show. Nothing daunted by my back down, Keyes let one or two others here in Fort Benton into the secret and they at once commenced preparations for the expedition. They built a mackinaw and loaded it with such supplies as might be needed,

and, I believe, in August, 1865, launched their craft and started for the new El Dorado, which, alas! they were never destined to reach. I am not certain as to the number of the party, but think it consisted of three men and two squaws. At any rate, the party were massacred by the Sioux before their destination was reached, one of the squaws only being spared to tell the bloody tale. Keyes' secret was buried with him; and while diggings were afterwards discovered in the Bear's Paw there evidently has been no such a find as was made by Keyes. So confident am I that he had "a big thing," I expect when this country is thrown open to take some part, either in person or by representative, in searching for Keyes' gold mine. Somebody will find it and become a bonanza king.

The New Reservations.

Action will probably soon be taken by congress as to cutting down the old Blackfoot reservation, or rather the establishment of boundaries for one or more new reserves for the red man. It would be well for us to examine the boundaries that have been given to their new reservations by the Indians themselves. At the council of Gros Ventres and Assinaboines, held at Fort Assinaboine last fall at the time of Major Maginnis and Senator Vest's visit for that purpose, a line running north and south, east of the Bear's Paw was proposed as the western limit of the new reserve, which would run from there east to the Dakota line. We understand that the Piegiens want the head waters of the Marias and the Sweet Grass hills in their new reservation, the western and southern boundary to be the same as at present—the Marias and Birch creek—and the eastern boundary to be a north and south line running east of the Sweet Grass hills. According to this proposed settlement of the boundaries a strip of country would be opened up to the whites extending from the Missouri and Marias on the south to the international boundary line on the north. About 75 miles square, or 5,625 square miles of the whole 45,000 square miles, would by this be given up to the whites, or about one-ninth of the present reservation. Out of that would have to be taken a liberal military reservation on Beaver creek and the Sandy for Fort Assinaboine, which would still further curtail the small portion to be ceded to the whites. This cession would give for settlement only the Bear's Paw country—including the streams which flow north from those mountains into Milk river and those which run south into the Missouri—also the upper or most unimportant part of the Milk river country. The 9,000 Indians in the northern reservation now have 45,000 square miles of territory and under the arrangement they still want 40,000 square miles left them. We cannot see what 9,000 Indians want of a vast country like that when hunting is a thing of the past and they are now dependent almost upon beef and flour provided by the government for their subsistence. Suppose they were allowed part of their reservation, from the 107th meridian, which would cut the Missouri river about Fort Peck, east to the Dakota line. This would give them some 12,000 square miles of territory, including the lower part of Milk river, about 150 miles of the Missouri river valley, Poplar river, Porcupine creek and innumerable smaller streams. If these people want to keep herds of cattle and bands of horses, to farm and become civilized, as are the inhabitants of the Indian territory, surely this is all the country they would need for that purpose. As these government paupers will have to be fed at a few agencies what is the sense in trying to spread some 9,000 redskins over as many square miles as the 5,000,000 white people of the state of New York possess? At some of the Indian agencies in Dakota, on the lower Missouri, you will find thousands of the natives gathered around one agency, learning to use the plow and hoe, and all contented because they are well fed. If they can not raise enough to support themselves the government supplies the deficiency and the fierce and war-like Sioux with a full stomach becomes as gentle as the proverbial lamb. It is only a question of time that the 9,000 Indians on this immense northern reserve will be treated in the same manner. What is the use of clipping off 5,000 square miles at a time when there is a grand total of 45,000 that is bound to be ceded to the whites in a very few years. The small proposed section of country to be opened up will only give temporary relief. Another year will see the stock men, ranchers and prospectors again clamoring for more land and mountains, and the same work will have to be gone all over again.

The three robbers, Marion Gamble, Thomas Sheldon and Fred. Wiley, who held up the Deer Lodge coach last summer, have been tried at Deer Lodge. Two pleaded guilty in part and one stood his trial. The latter gets a life sentence.

Statement of the Missouri River Business Between Bismarck, D. T., and Fort Benton, M. T., FOR 1883.

NAME OF LINE.	Boats.		UP STREAM.		DOWN STREAM.		TOTAL.	Passengers.
	Govt.	Private.	Govt.	Private.	Govt.	Private.		
Fort Benton Transportation Co. Benton "P" Line.	1,959,229	8,984,000	220,000	1,547,865	12,710,094	525		
Missouri River Transportation Co. Coulson Line.	542,350	7,098,943	50,000	977,957	8,668,250	365		
Transient Boats.	588,000	1,216,000	19,000	300,000	2,216,000	75		
Total.....	3,089,579	17,298,943	289,000	2,825,822	23,594,344	965		

NOTE.—The above includes only the business between Bismarck and Fort Benton. Two of the above-named steamers were destroyed: the Big Horn sank April 30th, five miles below Poplar creek, and the Butte was burned July 31st, at the third point above Fort Peck. There were no lives lost during the season.

RIVER AND RAILROAD.

I. P. Baker, General Agent of the Fort Benton Transportation Company (Benton "P" Line), interviewed.

The Prospects of the River Business Next Season, and Some Sensible Railroad Talk.

A RIVER PRESS representative "corralled" Mr. I. P. Baker, general agent of the Fort Benton transportation company, yesterday afternoon and succeeded in getting some interesting views from him on subjects in which our people are deeply interested. In answer to an inquiry as to the prospects of the river business next year he said: "The outlook is very good indeed. No further inroads on the territory of the river has been made by the railroads since the beginning of the boating season last year, so that the business of the coming year at any rate would be as good as the last. But we can reasonably expect that it will be much better, because of the largely increased settlement of the country tributary to Fort Benton and at points lower down the river. Then if this Indian reservation is opened to settlement it will add in no small way to the business of the boats—and altogether, I think the prospects of the upper Missouri for 1884 are flattering in the extreme."

"Will not the loss of the Big Horn and Butte last season cut off two crafts from the upper river fleet?" inquired the reporter.

"Their places can be easily supplied if there is business to warrant it. Besides the six boats of the Benton "P" and Coulson lines, the Batchelor, Behan, Eclipse, two Northern Pacific boats and others could be drafted into the service if there is business for them—and all of these are liable to make trips to the head of navigation next season."

"In what condition are the Benton "P" line boats to begin the season?"

"They were never better. We have expended over \$8,000 on the Helena, and the Black Hills and Benton are just as good as new. You can count on these boats doing their full share towards supplying Fort Benton with goods next season."

"Changing the subject from river to rail, do you think, Mr. Baker, that our town would be greatly benefited by the advent of the iron horse?"

"I most certainly do—if you get the right railroad."

"Which one is that?"

"A connection with the Canadian Pacific. Such a road would make Fort Benton the best town between St. Paul and Portland, and if our citizens are awake to their own interests they will leave no efforts undone to secure its construction as soon as possible. A connection with the Northern Pacific might give you a temporary boom, but what advantages in the way of freight rates will it give you, or what new fields of trade will it open up? Absolutely none. Billings or Helena could undersell your merchants, and the dealers in the Judith Basin (if the road came that way) would be independent of Benton. But it would be altogether different with a Canadian Pacific branch. That would make Fort Benton again the entrepot of the northwest territory, and your wholesale merchants here would sell goods in every town in that large field from Regina to the summit of the Rockies. I'll tell you why. They could afford to sell them cheaper because of more favorable freight tariffs. The large shippers of Fort Benton can get goods laid down here from Chicago, under favorable circumstances, for \$1.25 a hundred; I have never known better rates given from Chicago to Winnipeg than \$2. Fort Benton has, then, to start with, an advantage of 75 cents per cwt. over Winnipeg as a distributing point. The distance from Fort Benton to the Northwest territory is something over 100 miles; from Winnipeg to the same point over 800 miles, so that there could be no comparison of rates. With such undoubted advantages of transportation the northwest would again look to Fort Benton, and its growth and progress would be only equalled by that of St. Paul and Minneapolis. The building of this road would shortly bring you others and would hasten more than anything else the great future I believe there is in store for Fort Benton."

Mr. Baker, who is an A 1 boomer, had much else of interest to say about our prospective railroads for which we have

not space in this issue. In his opinion the Northwest and Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul will be compelled to build to Bismarck, and it will not be long until they are racing for supremacy in the magnificent country between the Missouri river and the boundary line, which means heading for Fort Benton.

The Bear's Paw Stampede.

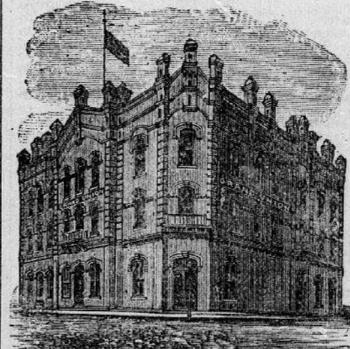
The Bear's Paw stampede in 1883 and its failure is pointed to as an evidence that mining in that region is not likely to be profitable. The facts are, however, that the stampede was not in the mountains but a few weeks until they were driven out by the military authorities. Several fine placer prospects were found but could not be worked and have not been to this day. A great many quartz locations were also made the alleged owners of which are now watching their opportunity to re-locate them when the proper time comes, which will be when the country is thrown open to settlement. The limited development done on these leads prove them to be valuable, and by this time next season many of them will be transformed into bonanzas. The stampede of '68 are the ones who have the greatest faith in the mines of the Bear's Paw, and when that is opened to settlement some of them will be the first in the mountains.

The Buffalo Herds.

It is feared that the band of buffalo on the great Sioux reservation will be annihilated this winter. Prairie fires have been set by the hunters and the herd is being driven slowly before the flames and toward the settlements, where they will be slaughtered in wholesale numbers. So far as reported the northern herd has not yet crossed the Missouri, and so far this year buffalo hunters in Montana have had no work in their favorite line. Indeed it is useless to disguise the fact that these monsters of the plains are disappearing with marvellous rapidity. Whether the herds are seeking new grazing grounds remote from too frequent signs of civilized man or whether they are actually vanishing from the face of the earth, a very little time will tell. Probably the latter is the case. Senator Vest said to Charles, the obstreperous chief of the Flatheads, "there are no more plains," and he was very near the truth. The wild Indian and the wild buffalo are in much the same predicament.

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First-class Accommodations for the Traveling Public. Sample Rooms for Commercial Travelers. This house is centrally located, and all coaches arrive at and depart from the door. First-class Bar and Billiard Room in the house. Charges Reasonable.

HUNSBERRY & TRAVERS, Proprietors.

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DEALER IN

GENERAL MERCHANDISE

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The Best Selected Stock of Goods in the Judith Basin.

"Quick Sales and Small Profits." Give us a trial and satisfy yourself.

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This is the supper station for coaches going both ways. Travelers and teams will find here the best of accommodations. AUGUST NAGLE.

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