

TOWN LIKE JONOLI'S GOULD

Story of the Boom Days in Dakota Reads Like Romance.

FAIRBANK THRIVED AND FADED

Built on Prospects, it Drew Thousands of Residents and Died as Quickly When Prospects Failed.

PIERRE, S. D., July 1.—Place your finger on the map of South Dakota at a point where a line drawn directly north would intersect the Missouri river and there you will be able to locate the site of the town of Fairbank, a city that had a mushroom growth for a period of six months and died almost as suddenly as it came into existence.

As the crow flies, Fairbank was located thirty-five miles north of this city and was conceived purely as a real estate boom scheme and within sixty days after the first lot sale was held, it had a population of close to 1,800 people. Now nothing remains to mark its greatness, aside from an excavation over which stood a building that remained for close to twenty-eight years, but which was destroyed by fire a few weeks ago.

The city of Fairbank, or rather the two Fairbanks, attracted the attention of the public for a few months during the spring of 1898. At that time the Western Townsite company, a subsidiary company of the Northwestern Railroad company, secured title to 100 acres of land due north of Pierre and thirty-five miles distant. Albert Keep, then president of the railroad company, was president of the townsite company. About the same time the Fairbank Townsite company of which Charles Walker, a real estate man of Pierre, was president and Judge Mariett Tripp, then of Yankton, S. D., but subsequently minister to Austria, was vice president, secured title to 300 acres of land adjoining that of the Western Townsite company.

In addition to the high standing of the officers of the two townsite companies, both officially and financially and the further fact that a few weeks after the town plans were filed with the secretary of the then territory of Dakota, that the Northwestern Railroad company sent out its map showing a contemplated line of road from Redfield to Fairbank, town lots sold at fabulous prices and in great numbers. On the same day, offices for the sale of lots in Fairbank were opened in New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Omaha, St. Paul and a dozen other cities, where capitalists, business men and laborers became purchasers, seeing in the purchases an enormous profit within a short time.

Boomed as a Capital. This was during January, 1898, and as a part of the same boom scheme, a bill was introduced in the South Dakota legislature, the last session ever held at Yankton, providing for the location of the capital at Fairbank. Bismarck, Pierre, Mitchell, Huron, Aberdeen, Sioux Falls, Jankton and a dozen other towns were in the list, so that it was believed that Fairbank stood an equal show with any of its competitors, considering the fact that it was proposed to donate to the then territory of Dakota 1,000 acres of land adjoining the town and \$500,000 of its bonds, the proceeds to be used in paying the cost of the erection of territorial buildings.

The Fairbank capital boom never got beyond the boom stage, but it served well the purpose for which it was intended, for on April 18, thirty days after the first lot sale was held, there were 300 buildings in course of erection. Additions to the original townsite had been laid out and planned, a park and boulevard system, more elaborate than those of most of the older towns, had been provided and an election had been called for the purpose of selecting officers and voting bonds for improvements. The territorial legislature had enacted a law, declaring the mushroom town a city and all that remained for the people to do was to ratify the act. The law designated the date and the manner of holding the election.

Candidates and Citizens. Candidates for the various offices came out thick and fast and the only one who was without opposition was W. D. Percival, publisher of the paper that was entering upon the second month of its career, which was to be short-lived. After giving the required notice provided for by law, the election was held, just two months after the first stork of lumber was hauled upon the townsite. Six hundred and forty-three votes were cast and it was estimated that there indicated a population of a little over 1,800 persons. They were living in tents, board shanties and even caves. A bed for a night in any one of the many hotels was worth \$1 and \$2 was not an unusual price. Meals and rent up to 25 cents to \$1, and were hard to get, at even that. Yet all the time more came pouring in to town to take part in the boom. They came on foot, by steamers up and down the Missouri river, as there were two lines, each operating three boats, which touched at the Fairbank landing usually three times a week.

In addition to those who walked and came via the river, hundreds were coming in on the stage, three and four coaches operating daily out of Pierre. All who were destined to Fairbank came to Pierre over the Northwestern road had a stage coupon attached to their tickets. This was a part of the regular railroad ticket and was good on any of the stage lines. If not used these coupons were redeemable at any of the Northwestern offices.

Bonds Were Plentiful. At the election for city officers numerous bonds were voted, there being little or no opposition. Capital bonds aggregating \$500,000 carried without a vote being cast against them. Besides these there were \$100,000 of sewer, \$10,000 of grading, \$50,000 of electric lights and \$25,000 of school house bonds voted, none of them meeting with much opposition.

Lots commenced to jump in price. Lots on Broadway that the townsite company two months before had sold for \$30 to \$50, went up to \$1,000 and \$5,000 and were sold and resold. It was nothing unusual for choice lots to double in value over night and it was nothing unusual for a man to go to bed the owner of a lot having a market value of \$1,000 and the next morning before breakfast, sell his holdings for \$3,000 to \$4,000. Real estate offices were on every corner. Many of them kept open all night, and while the boom was at its height, as much business was being done at midnight as during the day. Every man who had the price, wanted a lot in the town and if he did not secure it, he felt that he had lost the opportunity of a life time to make 100 and perhaps 1,000 per cent on his investment. Before the Fairbank cup of sorrow had been full, but now it was overflowing. To be publicly humiliated by an untutored savage was a little more than the average Fairbank man could stand. Silently merchant, banker, real estate agent, editor and every day citizen stood around and watched the Indians take their departure, an ugly, but well filled caravan.

Shortly after the Indian feast the farmers living in the eastern part of Sully and adjoining counties discovered that their money, as had been done by other Americans for centuries. He expressed the opinion that this was the entering wedge in an effort to take from them more of their land and that the whole scheme was too thin to hold even air.

ALPINE ENTERTAINER AT THE ROME SUMMER GARDEN.

As they would not be marketable. About this time the first blow to indicate the death of Fairbank came. The capitol commission, after visiting all of the towns that were applicants, decided to give the prize to Bismarck. The more conservative ones declared that this was a good thing and that Fairbank never really wanted to be the seat of Dakota's territorial government.

But disappointment to Fairbank did not come. Along in the summer of 1898 the Northwestern Railroad company issued a new official map and the projected extension from Redfield, across the country to the Missouri river, was omitted. This was real grief and a committee of prominent business men hurried to Chicago, where they held a conference with railroad officials, who assured the visitors that leaving the line off the map was "just a mistake of the printers and that it would appear next time." However, it has never appeared and after twenty-seven years, the townsite is no nearer a railroad than when it was platted.

Getting Away from Town. With the return of the committee from Chicago and the report being made public, the exodus commenced. People commenced to realize that there was no way of keeping the boom alive and as the country west of the river was an Indian reservation and that to the east occupied by homesteaders, who then were mostly poor, there was no immediate future for the town.

Percival, as editor of the paper, the Headlight, filled its columns with inspiration, he boosted the country and painted word pictures of the future of the town, pointing that the Missouri river was one of the great commercial highways of the country and that Fairbank would eventually become the metropolis of the central west.

By September 1 the boom had completely collapsed. Even the stage line had been pulled off and instead of stopping at the Fairbank landing, the steamers whistled disdainfully and passed by without even slackening their speed. It was then that a final effort was made to breathe life into the dying town.

Last of Fairbank's Effort. If Fairbank could but get the county seat of Sully county, then located at Clifton, a town of 100, it could pull through until a reaction would occur. It went into the fight, as did Onida, a small town in the east end of the county. In an attempt to confound the voters and secure their support, fifty acres of land were borrowed from a middle contractor at Pierre. Along about the middle of the month these scrapers were brought up from Pierre and with a band accompanying them, they were distributed through the county along the line of a road that the townsite company had surveyed. Money was raised by subscription and by taking what little remained in the Fairbank city treasury and grading commenced. This worked well enough and would have won the county seat fight had the money held out.

The day before election, the money having been all expended and it being impossible to raise any more, grading was suspended and all of the men discharged. The town was behind with the contractor and this individual immediately commenced to spread the information that there was nothing behind the railroad building and that it was simply a scheme to get votes for Fairbank for the county seat. That ended it, for Onida won hands down. Failing to secure the county seat, the exodus that had for a time been stayed started anew and families by the score sought new locations.

Editor's Efforts in Vain. Again Percival, the Headlight, attempted to stay the tide that threatened to sweep the town from its foundation. The morning following the election, in a double-column, double-leaded article, an extra edition of the paper was pulled off the old Washington hand press. This scored the people for their lack of confidence in the future of Fairbank and referred to the recent landslide of purchases and sales and consoled the readers by assuring them that it was "better to lose the prize than have won it by such disreputable methods as were adopted by the competitors." In another article, front page, top of column, he called attention to the possibilities of the town, predicting that it had a bright future as a manufacturing center, picturing coal fields to the west, which have never yet been discovered. He also told of the vast beds of clay in the bluffs east of the town and told how by bringing the raw products to Fairbank it could be converted into a metropolis, one into which the various products of the earth could be sent, thus adding wealth and building up a city that would be the pride of all Dakota.

Turns to the Indians. Again an effort was made to bring the town to the fore. Late in the fall Hump, the head chief of the Cheyennes, and Little No Heart, hereditary chief of the Two Kettle band of Sioux Indians, were invited to a feast. They were requested to bring their warriors, their squaws and papooses along, the idea being to cultivate a friendly feeling and secure the Indian trade of the country tributary. It then being occupied by between 1,500 and 2,500 families. Subscriptions were taken up among the inhabitants of the town and several hundred dollars raised. This was expended in buying a dozen fat steers, hundreds of loaves of bread and barrels of dried apples. For two days and two night preparations were in progress getting the barbecue and feast ready for the guests. Then the Indians came—almost 1,000 of them—bringing along the most ravishing appetites. Roast ox, potatoes, other vegetables, apple pie and dried apple sauce disappeared like dew before the morning sun.

At last the feast having been finished, the oratory commenced. As chief executive of the municipality if fell upon Mayor Percival to deliver the address. Not being proficient in Sioux, he spoke in English, which was interpreted by James Pearson, an American who had been raised among the Indians and who had married into a half breed family. The good qualities, bravery and honesty of the Indians was dwelt upon. The Indians were told that Fairbank wanted them for its friends and that when ever they visited there, they would be received as honored guests and made to feel at home.

Hump Tells What. With grunts of approval, Hump replied, he assured the mayor of the dying town that he and his people fully understood why they had been invited to the feast. It was for the purpose of attempting to secure their trade and beat them out of their money, as had been done by other Americans for centuries. He expressed the opinion that this was the entering wedge in an effort to take from them more of their land and that the whole scheme was too thin to hold even air.



MISS HIRSCHHORN.

their buildings. Two story structures that cost \$2,000 to \$5,000 were sold for \$300 to \$500. They were loaded onto wheels and soon commenced to move onto farms where they served for dwelling houses, barns or stables.

End of the Metropolis. Families continued to leave town in large numbers, having disposed of all of their property, except their lots, for which there was no sale. Week after week, and without enough advertising to draw a gun, the Headlight continued to appear. In one column it chastised the people for their disloyalty to the town in abandoning it in its hour of ill luck and in another it made the prediction that they would come back and eventually build up a bigger and better Fairbank. But this failed to have the desired effect. For days and almost weeks there was a continuous string of buildings moving off the townsite and out over the hills and for days and weeks there was a procession of citizens leaving the town. Some came to Pierre, but more sought other localities. This continued until late in the winter and when the only inhabitants remaining were two—Postmaster D. C. Nicol and Percival, mayor and publisher of the Headlight.

The postmaster had little to do, as the patrons of his office had long gone. However, he busied himself reading the exchanges and forwarding mail to addresses that had been left behind. Each week during the winter the Headlight was issued. White paper stock ran low and as the Headlight treasury was lower than the stock, week after week the regular issues were printed on wrapping paper that the editor found around the vacant business houses. As he was not advertising, the size of the paper was cut from an eight-column folio to a four-column, two-page sheet. But each week, while the editor lived on venison bought from the Indians for 50 cents per quarter carcass, in his paper he found Fairbank and told the story of the bright future, as he saw it. He sent his family away to live with relatives, and friends urged him to "let go the corpse." Indignantly he spurned what he designated as an insult and insisted that owing to "geographical location and a natural railroad crossing of the Missouri river, at some time in the near future the town must boom again and become the future city of Dakota."

As spring returned the Headlight lost the last of its paid subscribers, death having called him. The paper was then printed weekly. There was one for the files, one for the Postoffice department and forty-eight for the exchanges.

Mayor Percival Forever. The call to civilization became louder and stronger. Finally one bright morning the editor of the Headlight decided. On the first page, first column, as mayor of the city of Fairbank, he inserted that the following Saturday night, there would be a special meeting of the council, at which his resignation would be presented. In another column, he announced that with the "current issue, the Headlight will temporarily suspend publication." And in still another column he devoted himself to booming the town, expressing the opinion that the time would come when it would rank among the great cities of the land. That week the paper went to press as usual. Saturday night came and in his office, Mayor Percival convened the city council and called the roll of members. Name after name was read, but there was no response. Not a man was present, they having gone to probably as many states as there were names. The resignation was read, but as there were none to move the acceptance, it was put back into the mayor's pocket, where it remained until dismissed by age.

Several states can claim that they were a resident of Omaha has become a perpetual mayor, probably the only one of his kind in the country. The following morning, Editor Percival went out upon the deserted streets. There he met a farmer who had come in to pick up a load of drifted wood along the river. To this farmer the Headlight office building that had cost close to \$1,000 was sold for \$50 and later in the day, the lot on Broadway was traded to a half breed, even up, for a polished pair of buffalo horns, he getting the property that only a few months previous had a market value of \$2,000. The next day the plant of the Headlight was loaded into a farm wagon, hauled to Pierre, where it went onto the market as old junk.

The Order of Exercise. The school room practices of a half century ago are incredible to a modern pupil. It is well that they have not been continued, but an account of them by an eye witness is often amusing. One incident from A. H. Hall's "Old Bradford School Day" brings up a speaker who stands on the old principle, "No likin', no larlin'." Horace Walton, at recess, climbed to the top of the highest nut tree, and, losing his hold, fell to the ground. He struck on many of the limbs in his descent. The boys were terribly frightened as he struck the ground. Just as we crowded about him to see if he still lived, our faces as white as his, he fell rang for the resumption of studies.

The last boy in was Walton, and just as he fell rather than sit down in his seat the master shouted: "Come out here in-

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Amusements. The Ingraham Stock company has reached the final week of its engagement at the Gayety and after next Saturday night the company, as an organization, will be no more. Both Miss Fischer and Mr. Pollard have shown most convincingly that in the leading roles they were easily equal to every emergency and demand. The same might be said of every member of the company, which is a remarkably well balanced one. A pleasing feature of the engagement has been the fact that only plays either new to Omaha or plays that had never received stock production in Omaha were presented, and for the closing week, which opens this afternoon, "The Belle of Richmond," while not exactly new to Omaha, it has been so many years since it has been seen here that its presentation was considered a wise choice, especially so as there are so many excellent parts, thus affording each individual member of the company to appear in a role peculiarly suited to his or her talents and so leave in the mind of the most generous public only pleasant memories of the favorite Miss Fischer will be "Nellie" and Mr. Pollard "Gerald," and it is said that not since their coming to Omaha have these two excellent players been cast so happily.

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