

STIOUX CITY AND THE BLACK HILLS GOLD RUSH 1874-1877

Situated between the Belle Fourche River and the South Fork of the Cheyenne River are the Black Hills, famous not only for their scenery but also for their rich mineral resources. The Hills which cover an area of approximately 3500 square miles are, for the most part, embraced within the present counties of Custer, Lawrence, Meade, Pennington, and Fall River, in the State of South Dakota.¹ The region constitutes a geological system perfect and complete in itself, consisting of "a nucleus of upturned metamorphic rocks, mica-schists, slates, and quartzites of Archaean time, surrounded by encircling belts of the subsequent geological formations, extending continuously around the Hills, arranged in the order of their deposition, with a general dip from the center toward the level plains."² The country is rich in minerals, for besides gold and silver there are vast gypsum beds, mica, petroleum, natural gas, sandstones, limestones, granite, and marble.³

Until the year 1874, the Black Hills region was one of mystery. Though the district had been touched by Astor's fur parties as early as 1811, and afterwards had been skirted by various military expeditions, the interior had

¹ Steuart's *Mines and Quarries*, 1902, p. 308 (Special Reports of the Census Office).

² Jenney's *Report on the Mineral Wealth, Climate, and Rain-Fall, and Natural Resources of the Black Hills of Dakota*, p. 5, in *Senate Executive Documents*, 44th Congress, 1st Session, Doc. No. 51.

³ Steuart's *Mines and Quarries*, 1902, p. 308 (Special Reports of the Census Office).

never been explored by white men. Indian hostility alone had been sufficient to keep white men out of the Hills prior to 1868. In that year the United States government made a treaty with the Sioux Indians, in which it agreed to prevent the whites from entering the region. The fear of the Indians combined with the government restriction was effective in keeping the Hills closed until 1874, in spite of the fact that interest in exploring the forbidden territory was rapidly developing.⁴

One influence in arousing interest in the Black Hills was the belief that gold was to be found there. This belief was strengthened by the fact that the Indians were known to possess fine specimens of the precious metal. When asked where they obtained the gold, they would point in the direction of the Black Hills, but would never consent to show white people where they had found it.⁵

To Charles Collins, editor of the *Sioux City Times*, must be given much of the credit for arousing interest in the Black Hills. Originally his plans for the invasion of the Dakotas had nothing to do with the desire for gold. He was an ardent Fenian, and in 1869 conceived a grand scheme for the establishment of an Irish-American empire on the upper Missouri River. His idea was that the colonists could await a favorable opportunity and then invade Canada and wipe out the English there. His plan was submitted to a Fenian convention at St. Louis in 1869 and met with an enthusiastic reception. However, after a committee appointed for the purpose had visited the proposed

⁴ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, March 18, 1875; Robinson's *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, pp. 382-387, 408, in the *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. II, Pt. 2; Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 1-16.

Mrs. Annie D. Tallent, the author of this history, was the first white woman to enter the Black Hills, going with the first expedition from Sioux City in 1874.

⁵ Tallent's *The Black Hills*, p. 17.

area of settlement, it returned an unfavorable report and the project came to nothing.

Collins was not discouraged, but turned his efforts to a scheme for the settlement of the Black Hills. During the spring and summer of 1872 he published in his paper, the *Sioux City Times*, a series of sensational articles, depicting the wonders and resources of the Hills. He especially stressed the possibility of finding gold, though he had no knowledge that it existed there, other than the Indian tradition. Through the efforts of Collins, there was organized, on February 27, 1872, the "Black Hills Mining and Exploring Association of Sioux City". Among those actively interested in this company were Thomas H. Russell, an experienced frontiersman who had been attracted to Sioux City by Collins's editorials, and Dan Scott, editor of the *Sioux City Journal*. This plan also collapsed when the military authorities issued orders to disperse any expedition headed for the Black Hills and arrest the leaders.⁶

The chief influence, however, in arousing popular interest in the Black Hills was the Custer expedition of 1874. Acting under orders from General Philip H. Sheridan, General George A. Custer, on July 2, 1874, left Fort Abraham Lincoln, in Dakota Territory, with a force of 1200 men. The force moved in a southwesterly direction and on July 20th crossed the Belle Fourche River and entered the Black Hills region. After exploring the territory the troops returned to the fort on August 22, 1874, ³⁰ without experiencing any difficulty with the Indians.⁷ As ?

⁶ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, March 6, 1875; Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 5-8.

⁷ Robinson's *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, pp. 408, 413, in the *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. II, Pt. 2; *Harper's Weekly*, Vol. XVIII (September 12, 1874), p. 753.

a consequence of this exploration, which definitely ascertained that there was gold in the Hills, there occurred the great gold rush of 1874-1877.

General Sheridan in his annual report to the Secretary of War sought to minimize the importance of the gold discovery, and stressed rather the military value of Custer's expedition. He said in part:

The country of the Black Hills examined by Colonel Custer is, I am led to believe, of great value for its timber, and it contains some gold and silver, but the tests in the Custer reconnaissance are not sufficient to establish their existence in large quantities. I again recommend the establishment of a large military post there for the reasons given in my last report, viz, better control of the Indians.⁸

But the people were not interested in the military aspects of the question. It was what Custer said in regard to the resources of the Hills, and especially in regard to the finding of gold, that attracted popular attention and produced the gold fever. On August 2, 1874, Custer dispatched a long telegram to the headquarters of the Department of Dakota at St. Paul. He depicted the wonderful scenery of the Hills, the abundance of grass for grazing, the streams of clear running water, the timber, the rich soil, and the fruits growing wild. Then came the most interesting part of the report to the effect that gold had been found at several places and that it was the belief of the scientists accompanying the expedition that it would be found in paying quantities. This point was not discussed at length for General Custer continued:

As we have never remained longer at our camp than one day, it will be readily understood that there is no opportunity to

⁸ *Report of the Secretary of War*, pp. 24, 25, in *House Executive Documents*, 43rd Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. I, Pt. 2, Doc. No. 1.

make a satisfactory examination in regard to deposits of valuable minerals. Veins of lead and strong indications of the existence of silver have been found. Until further examination is made regarding the richness of the gold, no opinion should be formed. Veins of what the geologists term gold-bearing quartz crop out on almost every hillside.⁹

This report was given to the press on August 12, 1874, and was soon reprinted in newspapers throughout the country. Nowhere did it arouse keener interest than in Iowa. On August 22, 1874, the *Northern Vindicator*, published at Estherville, reproduced part of the report under the title, "Another Eldorado". The *Iowa State Register*, published at Des Moines, printed the report on August 24th, under the heading "Discovery of a New Paradise". But the remarks of these papers were mild compared to those of the *Sioux City Times*. It said: "The great north-western mystery, which has been the waking dream of miners and adventurers for the past twenty years, is at last unveiled. The Black Hills Country has been invaded and explored. Custer and his command have traveled up their rugged ranges on the north, climbed their highest peak, sauntered on their sunny southern slopes, and is now on his return to Fort Lincoln. At last we have reliable information from the hills, which shows a reality exceeding the brightest pictures ever painted by our imagination." This paper called attention to the fact that the chief gold discoveries of the Custer expedition were in the placers in the eastern part of the Hills. The effect of this, said the *Times*, would be to give to Sioux City "and the routes radiating from here, a decided preference with the army

⁹ Letter from the Secretary of War, pp. 5, 6, in *Senate Executive Documents*, 43rd Congress, 2nd Session, Doc. No. 32.

of pioneers that will in the near future immigrate to this latest and apparently greatest El Dorado."¹⁰

In anticipation of the rush to the Black Hills which it was expected would follow the publication of the Custer report, both the *Sioux City Journal* and the *Times* made haste to advertise the desirability of outfitting at Sioux City and starting the journey to the Hills from that city. "The great natural route to the Northwest", said the *Journal*, "is by way of Sioux City We are the nearest base of supplies to the Black Hills. We have the only all good country intervening."¹¹

The *Times* was much more profuse in urging the gold seekers to go to the Hills by way of Sioux City. It showed that a considerable amount could be saved travellers from the East if they went to the gold district by way of Sioux City and Yankton, rather than by way of Bismarck or Cheyenne,¹² because of the shorter distance by the first named route. It also urged the advantages of Sioux City as an outfitting point and stressed the fact that the route from Sioux City to the Black Hills was more feasible than any other route. "On this route, all the way, there is abundance of timber, water and grazing, while, to approach the Hills from any other direction, either from Laramie on the South, or Bismarck on the North, the traveler must pass over the timberless and waterless plains of Wyoming, or over the dreaded *mauvaise terres* or bad lands of Dakota."¹³

¹⁰ Robinson's *A History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, p. 414, in the *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. II, Pt. 2; *Sioux City Weekly Times*, August 15, 1874.

¹¹ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, August 20, 1874.

¹² Bismarck and Cheyenne, as well as Sioux City, played important parts in the Black Hills gold rush, but it is primarily the purpose of this article to develop the part taken by the last named city.

¹³ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, August 22, 1874.

The first civilian expedition to leave for the Black Hills, after the Custer exploration, was organized at Sioux City. As early as May, 1874, before the departure of Custer's expedition, Charles Collins and T. H. Russell had undertaken a new project for the invasion of the forbidden land. In three months, according to the *Times*, communications had been received from three hundred men who desired to go to the Hills. While Custer was still in the region, they had gone to Chicago, where, by the 13th of August, 1874, they had enrolled 11,000 men, who were anxious to go to the "new Eldorado".¹⁴

The extensive publicity given the project soon attracted the attention of the military authorities. As a result there was issued from the headquarters of the Military Division of the Missouri at Chicago, on August 27, 1874, an order to General Alfred H. Terry at St. Paul not to permit expeditions to enter the Black Hills. In commenting on this order, which it published in the same issue, the *Sioux City Journal* expressed doubt as to whether it would be strictly enforced and was of the opinion that gold seekers would disregard it. It continued:

We do not apprehend the adventuresome spirits who have been woke up by General Custer's glowing stories will yield without an effort. If General Custer had kept out of the Black Hills there would have been no other movement, at present at least, in that direction. If the military expedition was not intended as an opening wedge to that country, then it was an inexcusably wicked thing on the part of [the] Government. Therefore the sincerity of the instructions to General Terry will be doubted. Therefore at any rate, the irresistible forward march on the Black Hills was commenced.¹⁵

After the issuance of this order, Collins and Russell os-

¹⁴ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, March 6, 1875.

¹⁵ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, September 3, 1874.

tensibly gave up their plan, publicly announcing that the expedition had been abandoned, and after his return to Sioux City, the *Journal* published the result of an interview with Collins. He asserted that within a week he could concentrate 6000 men at Sioux City, but under the circumstances he felt disinclined to violate such plain orders of the military himself or to ask others to disregard them. The report continued:

So far as the present expedition is concerned, Mr. Collins asserts that he will "take a back seat". He desires to go to the Black Hills, but will only do so by the consent and countenance of the Government. His effort in organizing an expedition, he says, has demonstrated the fact that the people are wide awake to such rare enterprises, and he feels confident that, should Congress take such action upon the Black Hills question by another spring as he has reasons to believe will be taken—a person will have no trouble in raising an army of 10,000 pioneers, who will be ready to march forth upon the first sound of the trumpet.¹⁶

But Collins and his associates had no real intention of abandoning their plan for the invasion of the Black Hills. Such public announcements were mere camouflage for the preparations which were already under way. A meeting of those interested was held in the rooms of the Irish Literary Society in the *Times* building, as a result of which about fifty men signed the roll of the Black Hills expedition.¹⁷ A few days later the *Times* stated that several hundred letters were being received at its office from men who were eager to go to the Hills. "At Sioux City", it said, "the excitement is intense. Not less than one hundred frontiersmen, men who have seen service in the mountains and on the plains, are anxiously awaiting

¹⁶ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, September 10, 1874.

¹⁷ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, August 29, 1874.

the departure of the expedition." It stated that, on September 3rd, two tents of fifty capacity each had been pitched on Prospect Hill to house the gold seekers, while many others were being accommodated at the hotels. The paper again called attention to the advantages of Sioux City as an outfitting point. For about \$100, it stated, a man could secure all the necessary articles which included a rifle, revolver, flour, salt, ammunition, blankets, cooking utensils, a pick, shovel, and gold pan. For \$569.85 full equipment for a party of five could be secured, including a wagon, horses, provisions, and tools. The *Times* expressed the opinion that the government would not interfere in spite of its warning. It urged that none should start until they received orders from Collins and Russell.¹⁸

After the announcement in the *Journal* on September 10th that the expedition had been abandoned, preparations were carried on more secretly to avoid attracting the attention of the military. The party which had finally agreed to make the journey assembled three miles west of the Missouri River, from which point they started for the Hills on October 16, 1874. They had placarded their wagons with the words "O'Neil Colony", to give the impression that they were destined for a settlement that was being established in the Elkhorn Valley and thus avoid suspicion.¹⁹

The movements of this expedition were kept out of the papers at the time and it was not until several weeks later that mention of its departure was made. In reply to an article in the *Journal* which intimated that the expedition would probably camp for the winter on the Niobrara River, the *Times* stated emphatically that there was no

¹⁸ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, September 5, 1874.

¹⁹ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, March 6, 1875.

intention to stop before reaching the Hills, in spite of Indians or other obstacles. It said further: "The men who are the controlling spirits, and those who largely compose the Expedition, fully realized the task they had undertaken, both before they started and at the present time, and letters just received at this office, of the latest dates, speak in the most encouraging way of the sanguine and hopeful feeling that pervades the members of the Expedition as to their early entry of the Black Hills. We predict that ere this paper reaches its readers, the Expedition will be safe in the Black Hills."²⁰

No further news concerning the expedition was published until the following February. Then the *Times* published the following statement: "The Times Black Hills expedition has been heard from. The party successfully made the entry into the Hills, and are safely and comfortably quartered in the very centre of what is believed to be the richest mineral section of the Hills. They have plenty of provisions, abundance of game, have had no serious mishaps, and all are in good spirits. As to their success, this being a purely private expedition, gotten up mainly to solve, practically test, and reliably learn just what the Hills contained, it is deemed essential, to the interest of those most vitally interested, to withhold from the public for the present, just what our expedition has thus far discovered and accomplished."²¹

About two weeks later, two members of the expedition, Eph Witcher and John Gordon, returned to Sioux City from the Hills which they had left on February 2, 1875. Their arrival occasioned considerable excitement in the city. The *Times* devoted almost two full pages to their

²⁰ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, November 7, 1874.

²¹ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, February 20, 1875.

account of the expedition, and to the letters which they brought from various members who had remained in the Hills, including Mrs. Annie D. Tallent, D. G. Tallent, R. R. Whitney, Capt. T. H. Russell, and J. Newton Warren. This account was the first detailed information that was given the public concerning the Collins-Russell expedition, by which name it is best known. There were twenty-eight persons in the party which left Sioux City, including one woman, Mrs. Annie D. Tallent and one boy, her son. Collins did not accompany the party, but Russell did. John Gordon, who was familiar with the country, acted as the guide. Except for the desertion of one member and the death of another there was no serious mishap enroute. Neither government troops nor hostile Indians were encountered. The party reached their destination on December 28, 1874, and immediately proceeded to construct a stockade on French Creek for the purpose of protection. Seven log cabins were built within the stockade to house the members of the party. After this work was accomplished, enough prospecting was done to find some gold to send back to Sioux City with Witcher and Gordon.²²

Meanwhile, the government troops were seeking the party with a view to removing them from the Hills. Early in December, a detachment under Captain Tolman was sent out from Fort Sully but because of insufficient provisions was forced to give up the chase after fifteen days. On December 26, 1874, a cavalry detachment under Colonel Henry left the Red Cloud Agency on a similar mission, but this force also returned unsuccessful, because of the extreme cold. Commenting on these incidents, the *Times* said:

²² *Sioux City Weekly Times*, March 6, 1875. A full account of the Collins-Russell expedition is found in Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 18-102.

The government may as well make up their minds that the Sioux City Times Expedition, now in the Black Hills, are invincible and impregnable. We say it in all candor, and not in a spirit of braggadocio, that the government is fooling away both its time and money, when they undertake to move our boys out of the Hills with any ordinary body of troops. The men who compose the Sioux City Times Black Hills Expedition. . . . believe they have a right to mine and develop the resources of that country, and they will do it, unless the military send in an army large enough to capture twenty-seven as brave and determined frontiersmen as ever drew a bead on a buffalo, or scalped an Indian. We predict that our friends, when they come out of the Black Hills, will come out of their own accord, and not till then.²³

But this prediction by the *Times* was not realized. Early in April, 1875, the party was located by a detachment of cavalry commanded by Captain Mix, and ordered to depart. No resistance was made to the carrying out of the order. Taking only the most essential articles, and abandoning the rest of their possessions, the gold seekers, on April 7, began the trip to Fort Laramie, Wyoming, under military escort. After a short detention they were paroled, and accompanied by Collins, who had gone to Fort Laramie as soon as he had received news of their arrest, returned to Sioux City on April 30, 1875, by way of the Sioux City and Pacific Railroad.²⁴

Elaborate preparations were made for the reception of the party in Sioux City. According to the *Journal*, at least a thousand men were gathered at the depot "to welcome the original Black Hillers back to Sioux City". As the train rolled in, the band of the Light Guard played "a lively air", a six-pounder "woke the echoes", while

²³ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, January 16, 1875.

²⁴ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, May 1, 1875; Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 84-100.

the crowd "struggled with each other for a first sight of the heroes". As soon as possible a hollow square was formed by the uniformed fire department, in which the Black Hillers, "with trusty rifles in hand", took position. Fire Chief E. R. Kirk, the master of ceremonies, then introduced Mayor Warner, who expressed "the formal welcome of Sioux City". The mayor "spoke of Sherman's march to the sea, of Fremont's expedition, of Custer's explorations in the land from whence they were just returned, and assured the men that they had done a more heroic thing and a braver thing. He said they had prepared the way for the opening up to settlement of the country, and done much toward settling the vexed Indian question."²⁵

Certain capitalists of Sioux City were quick to perceive the opportunity to reap a harvest of gold by transporting freight and passengers to the Black Hills. The first transportation company to be organized was the Sioux City and Black Hills Transportation Company. At a meeting on March 10, 1875, James A. Sawyers was chosen president of the company, Ed. Henn was made secretary, D. T. Gilman treasurer, and Fred T. Evans superintendent. The directors elected were A. W. Hubbard, H. D. Booge, J. L. Follett, C. E. Hedges, J. A. Sawyers, George Weare, J. H. Charles, H. L. Warner, and H. A. Hamilton. Ten thousand dollars was pledged for the purpose of securing the necessary equipment.²⁶

During the next few weeks the company exhibited great activity in preparing for the first expedition which it was proposed to start for the Hills on April 1, 1875. John Gordon, who had successfully led the Collins-Russell expedition to the Black Hills, was selected as the leader. The

²⁵ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, May 6, 1875.

²⁶ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, March 11, 1875.

expedition was advertised in the *Sioux City Journal* and other papers, and soon strangers were coming to the city to join it.²⁷

The Sioux City and Black Hills Transportation Company was bitterly denounced by Collins in the *Times*. He said that the company was a fraud, and asserted that the open advertisement of its intentions in defiance of government orders to keep out of the Indian country had caused the route from Sioux City to the Black Hills to be singled out for a government embargo. "This", said the *Times*, "will drive the tide of the Black Hills immigration that for years we have been working to bring by way of Sioux City to other points that are not placed under Government surveillance. This has all been brought about by the Gordon swindlers."²⁸ Evidently Collins was angered by the fact that he had not been taken into the new company, and that others seemed about to reap where he had sown.

Newspapers outside of Sioux City were also denunciatory in their attitude towards the transportation company. In an editorial entitled "The Black Hills Humbug", the *Northern Vindicator* of Estherville referred to the sensational stories which were being circulated concerning the Black Hills, and said:

Sioux City leads in this matter, and it is amusing to note, that, instead of forming a mining company to develop the richness of the mines, the enterprising capitalists of that City confine themselves to the organization of a transportation company, charging from one to two hundred dollars per head passage money.²⁹

The *Iowa State Register* of Des Moines also discounted the stories emanating from Sioux City. It reprinted from

²⁷ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, March 11, 18, 1875.

²⁸ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, April 17, 1875.

²⁹ *Northern Vindicator* (Weekly, Estherville), March 27, 1875.

the *Sioux City Journal* Gordon's statement concerning the Collins-Russell expedition and the Black Hills, and commented as follows:

It is well enough for everybody, before they get excited over the above news, to remember that Sioux City has once or twice before got up a Black Hills excitement, that it is at that point that this so-called expedition was formed; and that it has a good deal to gain, as a fitting out point, for expeditions which may be organized hereafter. These highly-colored dispatches must be taken with caution. Let all who want gold, and are willing to go even to the Black Hills to get it, remember the many hoaxes and humbugs in the past, and the very slight foundation on which the Sioux City dispatches are building up this new bonanza now.³⁰

In spite of the fact that General Sherman, on March 17, 1875, from the headquarters of the army at St. Louis, had issued orders to expel all intruders on Indian land,³¹ the preparations for the departure of the Gordon expedition were openly carried on. The train was not ready to start on April 1st as originally announced, and it was not until April 25th that the party was ferried across the Missouri River, so as to be ready to start the overland journey on the following day.³² All went well with the expedition, which consisted of about one hundred and fifty men, forty-seven wagons, and between seventy and eighty teams, until May 13, 1875. On that day the expedition was intercepted by troops and part of the members made prisoners. When the news of this reached Sioux City, the Transportation Company, on May 21, 1875, sent a telegram to Secretary of War William W. Belknap asking the release and return

³⁰ *Iowa State Register* (Weekly, Des Moines), March 12, 1875.

³¹ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, March 25, 1875.

³² Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 120-123.

of the prisoners.³³ The remainder of the expedition proceeded on their journey, thinking that they would not be molested further. But on the morning of May 21, 1875, their camp was surrounded by two companies of cavalry commanded by Captain Fergus Walker. According to the reports sent to the Sioux City papers, the soldiers were allowed to pillage the camp, and then fire was set to the remaining property, including fourteen of the wagons. It was claimed that \$25,000 worth of property of "law abiding citizens" was destroyed. The whole party, consisting of eighty men and one woman, was taken to Fort Randall, where the thirty-eight persons previously captured had been taken. The affair aroused the greatest resentment in Sioux City, and was described by the newspapers of that city as an "outrage". It was claimed that the expedition was not in Indian territory at the time of their capture, so that the troops had no justification for their action.³⁴ That there was some basis for this claim was shown by later court action. While other members of the expedition were paroled John Gordon, the leader, was kept a prisoner by the military. A writ of *habeas corpus* was applied for on July 22nd and granted by Judge Elmer S. Dundy in the court at Falls City, Nebraska, on August 24, 1875. In granting the writ, which ordered General George Crook to deliver Gordon for civil trial, the judge declared that the destruction of the property of the expedition had been unauthorized by law.³⁵ On Gordon's being delivered for trial, Judge Dundy ordered him to be released, and the incident was closed.³⁶

³³ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, May 27, 1875.

³⁴ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, May 29, 1875; *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, May 27, June 10, 17, 1875; Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 120-123.

³⁵ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, September 9, 1875.

³⁶ Tallent's *The Black Hills*, p. 122.

The fate of the Gordon expedition had the effect of discouraging any further attempts to send large expeditions from Sioux City to the Hills in 1875. Not only was the Sioux City and Black Hills Transportation Company forced to suspend operations, but the Witcher Company, established by N. L. Witcher, also found it necessary to give up its plans. Witcher sold his equipment, saying it was impossible to get wagon trains into the Black Hills.³⁷

Both the *Sioux City Times* and the *Journal* expressed the general dissatisfaction with the government restriction. Both suggested that individuals or small parties could dash into the Hills, while larger parties would be intercepted. Thus, the *Times* said:

It ought to be generally understood that because the government has issued orders to stop the Sioux City Transportation Company party from going to the Black Hills, is not any reason that private expeditions . . . or parties starting from Sioux City will be interfered with—neither do they take any greater risks of being captured by troops than expeditions that have already started, or are in process of organization at other points. The government already realizes that 50,000 men intend to celebrate the Fourth of July in the Black Hills, and that to put a cordon of troops around the belt of States and Territories from which the Black Hills can be reached, would require an army only equaled by that called out in the late civil war. Private expeditions are being organized at Sioux City for the Hills, and those desiring to join any of them would do well to be here on or before the first of May. Merchants and others in anticipation of the coming rush have laid in immense stocks of goods especially adapted for miners use, which they are now offering at less figures than the same goods can be duplicated at retail in any other city in the union. This we can demonstrate to the satisfaction of all.³⁸

³⁷ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, July 22, 1875.

³⁸ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, April 17, 1875.

That the suggestion of these papers was acted on is shown by the fact that by the summer of 1875 there were hundreds of miners in the Black Hills. Of these many were Iowans who had gone to the gold district by way of Sioux City. According to the *Iowa State Register*, there was scarcely a town of any size in the State that did not contribute at least "one pilgrim for the apparently foolish journey".³⁹ Though these miners succeeded in evading the troops and entering the Hills, the government was not content to let them remain there. Instead of attempting to drive them out by force, General George Crook personally visited the gold region. After conversing with the miners to secure their views, Crook issued a proclamation requesting the miners to leave the Hills voluntarily, and suggesting that they hold a meeting on August 10, 1875, to discuss the matter. The meeting was held, as scheduled, at Custer City, and the miners decided to comply peaceably with the proclamation. They left immediately, leaving only a few of their number to care for the property left behind. Lieutenant Colonel Richard I. Dodge, who was present, described the scene as follows: "On the evening of August 10th, the beautiful valley of French Creek, near Custer City, was picturesque with miners' camps. At sunrise on the morning of the 11th, not a man or animal was to be seen. The valley, so lately bustling with life, was still and solitary. Thin wreaths of smoke, arising from expiring camp-fires, were all that remained to tell of the swarm of people which crowded the valley the day before." Dodge estimated that six hundred miners left the Hills at this time.⁴⁰

This wholesale removal had little effect on the situation,

³⁹ *Iowa State Register* (Weekly, Des Moines), April 2, 1875.

⁴⁰ Dodge's *The Black Hills*, pp. 112-114.

for miners continued to evade the troops and enter the Hills. Some of these were captured and removed from the region. After being detained as prisoners at some fort for a time they would be brought before a United States commissioner who invariably released them. The miners, in many instances, would then reënter the Black Hills by some circuitous route and hide in the gulches where they could prospect for gold without molestation.⁴¹

While the government was assiduously endeavoring to keep miners out of the Black Hills, it was also engaged in definitely ascertaining the resources of the region. On March 27, 1875, Walter P. Jenney, a noted geologist, was instructed by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to visit the Black Hills and report on their mineral wealth, climate, and natural resources. On May 24, 1875, the expedition left Fort Laramie, Wyoming, with an escort of four hundred troops under command of Lieutenant Colonel Richard I. Dodge. The party remained in the region until October 24, 1875, and after its return Jenney submitted an exhaustive report of his findings. It was conclusively shown that gold was to be found in the Hills in paying quantities.⁴² This report aroused wide interest for it corroborated the claims that the Hills were rich in gold and it put to rest the charges that Sioux City and other interested points were promoting a "humbug".

At no place did the Jenney expedition arouse more interest than at Sioux City. Referring to a statement by

⁴¹ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, September 23, 1875; Tallent's *The Black Hills*, p. 135.

⁴² Robinson's *History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, p. 416, in the *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. II, Pt. 2; Jenney's *Report on the Mineral Wealth, Climate, and Rain-Fall, and Natural Resources of the Black Hills of Dakota*, pp. 1-56, in *Senate Executive Documents*, 44th Congress, 1st Session, Doc. No. 51.

Jenney to the effect that gold existed in paying quantities, the *Sioux City Journal* said:

His language, as to be expected, is guarded but it is clear that his explorations fully sustain the popular belief in regard to the mineral wealth of the country. This result will naturally tend to greatly quicken the desires of the adventuresome to try their luck there, and another season, if not this, we may expect to see thousands flocking thither—treaty or no treaty.⁴³

In mentioning the "treaty", the *Journal* was referring to the attempt of the government to negotiate a new treaty with the Indians either to permit miners to enter the Hills or else to purchase the Indian title to the district. Commissioners for the purpose were appointed by the Secretary of the Interior on June 18, 1875. The commission consisted of William B. Allison of Iowa, chairman, Alfred H. Terry, A. Comingo, Samuel D. Hinman, G. P. Beaubias, A. G. Lawrence, and William H. Ashby. The party reached the Red Cloud Agency on September 4, 1875, but it was not until September 20th that the first council of the commission with Indians representing twelve tribes was held. Negotiations continued without success until September 29th, when the council broke up. The younger Indians were unwilling to part with the Hills at any price, while those who were willing to sell set a price which the commissioners considered exorbitant. One of the spokesmen of the Indians demanded \$70,000,000 for the region.⁴⁴

The failure of these negotiations was followed by the withdrawal of all military opposition to the occupancy of the Black Hills. Immediately there began a great rush of gold seekers who had been eagerly awaiting the removal

⁴³ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, October 21, 1875.

⁴⁴ Robinson's *History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, pp. 416-421, in the *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. II, Pt. 2.

of the government restriction to enter the region. Although government opposition to the invasion of the Black Hills was now withdrawn, a greater danger confronted the adventurers. The Indians, fearing that their hunting grounds would be taken from them by force, went on the war path early in 1876. There followed a bloody warfare, which lasted about a year and a half. The outstanding event of this Sioux war was the Custer massacre, on June 25, 1876. Though hostilities did not cease until May 6, 1877, a treaty providing for the cession of the Black Hills was negotiated with the Indians, September 23 to October 27, 1876. By the terms of this treaty the Indians were to receive \$4,500,000 for the Black Hills region, which was to be opened for legal settlement on February 28, 1877.⁴⁵

Indian hostilities did not stop the migration to the gold region but did have a retarding effect. According to the *Sioux City Tribune*,⁴⁶ the Indians were "making it decidedly lively for those who are passing in or out of the Hills, and seem to be lying in wait for unprotected miners all about the settlements. It is probable that mining operations will soon be suspended until next season."⁴⁷ Travellers returning to Sioux City from the Hills reported that considerable numbers were leaving the region because of the fear of Indian raids.⁴⁸

But while a few were leaving the Hills, many more were entering in spite of the dangers confronting them. Mrs.

⁴⁵ Robinson's *History of the Dakota or Sioux Indians*, pp. 422-445, in the *South Dakota Historical Collections*, Vol. II, Pt. 2; *Iowa State Register* (Weekly, Des Moines), July 14, September 15, 29, 1876.

⁴⁶ Early in 1876 Charles Collins sold the *Sioux City Times* which was thereafter published as the *Sioux City Tribune*.

⁴⁷ *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), September 8, 1876.

⁴⁸ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, September 7, 1876.

Tallent, in describing the rush to the Black Hills which took place between the fall of 1875 and the summer of 1877, said: "Representatives of every trade and profession under the sun came rushing along, figuratively, tumbling over each other in their headlong haste to be the first to reach the New Eldorado, each individual sanguine of realizing fabulous wealth on reaching the end of his journey." They went in companies or as individuals, in wagons, on horseback, or on foot. As a result of this great inrush of gold seekers in one short year "the whole aspect of the Black Hills was transformed from a wilderness into a scene of busy life, furnishing to those who had seen them in all their primitiveness a striking contrast indeed."

Many of these adventurers fell victims to the Indians—how many will never be known. As Mrs. Tallent said:

The numerous new-made graves, seen along the various highways into the Hills, marking the scenes of the dark tragedies enacted nearby, revealed in mute but eloquent language, the sad fate of not a few,—graves of the poor victims, whose mutilated bodies were oftentimes found and hastily buried by other pilgrims following in their wake—graves with only a small piece of pine board to serve as a monument to mark the spot, and with no other epitaph than the simple word—"Unknown", inscribed thereon.⁴⁹

Sioux City reaped its share of the benefits resulting from the great migration to the Black Hills. Alive to the possibility of doing a thriving business, representative business men of the city held a meeting early in 1876, at the county auditor's office, "to devise means for making the advantages of Sioux City as a starting and outfitting point for the Black Hills more generally known." Charles Collins was selected to go East "and present the claims and advantages of Sioux City and the Upper Missouri

⁴⁹ Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 115-117.

river routes as against the great American desert route via Sidney and Cheyenne." A committee, consisting of Judge A. W. Hubbard, E. W. Skinner, J. L. Follett, Fred T. Evans, and Charles Collins, was selected "to raise funds and make such other arrangements as to them seemed best to carry out the object and spirit of the meeting."⁵⁰

Not only did the Sioux City merchants take steps to reap a harvest from those bound for the Black Hills, but the transportation companies also prepared to do a thriving business. A meeting of the directors of the Sioux City and Black Hills Transportation Company, which had been forced by the government restriction to suspend operations in 1875, was held on March 3, 1876, at the First National Bank. It was decided to resume business immediately, and plans were made to send out the first train about March 15th.⁵¹ As a part of its preparations, the company constructed a large warehouse for storing freight and several stables for the accommodation of stock, at Covington, Nebraska.⁵² On April 13, 1876, an expedition consisting of twenty-five wagons and about one hundred and fifty men, outfitted at Sioux City, left Covington for the Black Hills. Six of the wagons belonged to the Sioux City and Black Hills Transportation Company, while the rest belonged to private individuals who had congregated from all quarters. John Gordon accompanied the party as guide.⁵³

From this modest beginning grew one of the largest transportation companies operating between the Black

⁵⁰ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, February 19, 1876.

⁵¹ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, March 4, 1876.

⁵² *Sioux City Tribune (Weekly)*, March 31, 1876.

⁵³ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, April 13, 1876.

Hills and outside points. Its business was promoted by the fact that gold seekers found it a protection against hostile Indians to travel with the company's large parties which were sent out every few days in the spring of 1876. As the *Sioux City Tribune* said:

Parties intending to go to the Hills hereafter will find it greatly to their convenience and protection against the Indians to go by the company's trains; for the reason that as the grass becomes abundant on the prairies, Indian raids will become numerous. The reds are already beginning to put on the war paint, we learn from late advices, and intend to urge a vigorous, bloody and relentless war upon Black Hills pilgrims. Parties going to the Hills should bear this in mind, and take care to go in large bodies and well armed. This can be done by joining the transportation company's trains, better than in any other way.⁵⁴

Until the late summer of 1876, this company continued to send wagon trains directly to the Hills from Sioux City. In August, 1876, the company was reorganized with Fred T. Evans and John Hornick as the chief members of the firm. Instead of hauling freight and passengers by wagon from Sioux City, these were first transported up the Missouri River to Fort Pierre, thence overland to the Hills.⁵⁵ On February 7, 1877, Evans, Hornick and Company entered into an agreement with the Dakota Southern Railroad, which extended from Sioux City to Yankton. By this agreement the railroad was to transport passengers and freight from Sioux City to Yankton. There a transfer was to be made to the boats of the Missouri River Transportation Company which would carry the passengers and freight to Fort Pierre. Thence they were to be carried overland to the Black Hills by Evans and Hornick's Freight Line. At the same time a definite schedule

⁵⁴ *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), April 28, 1876.

⁵⁵ *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), August 18, 1876.

of rates for passengers and freight was agreed on. The first class passenger rate from Sioux City to Yankton was \$3.00, from Yankton to Fort Pierre \$10.00, and from Fort Pierre to either Deadwood, Custer, or Crook City, in the Black Hills, \$10.00. The rate for one hundred pounds of freight from Sioux City to Yankton was to be \$.25, from Yankton to Fort Pierre \$.75, and from Fort Pierre to Deadwood \$3.00. It was also announced that the sixty-one mile trip by rail from Sioux City to Yankton would consume four hours, the boat ride from Yankton to Fort Pierre, a distance of two hundred and ninety miles would take sixty hours, while the overland journey, from Fort Pierre to Crook City, a distance of one hundred and twenty-five miles, would take from four to six days. Trains were to run daily, boats tri-weekly and wagon trains weekly, or oftener, if necessary.⁵⁶

This firm of Evans and Hornick continued to carry on a lucrative business with the Black Hills until 1888, when together with other transportation companies, it was forced out of business by the competition of the railroads which had entered the region. In 1878, the shipping point of the company was changed from Sioux City to Chamberlain, Dakota, to connect with the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad. The extent of this company's operations may be realized from the fact that it employed from one thousand to fifteen hundred men and wagons, from two thousand to three thousand oxen, and from one thousand to fifteen hundred mules.⁵⁷

Another transportation line connecting Sioux City with the Black Hills was the Witcher Company. Compared to the firm of Evans and Hornick it was a small concern.

⁵⁶ *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), February 9, 1877.

⁵⁷ Tallent's *The Black Hills*, pp. 189, 190.

This line had also begun operations in 1875 but had been forced to suspend its activities because of the government restrictions. Up to February, 1877, N. L. Witcher, who, with his sons, composed the firm, had completed fourteen trips to the Black Hills. Because he used oxen exclusively to pull his wagons and because of his speed in transporting freight, he was familiarly known in the Hills as "the lightning bull freighter". Witcher hauled his freight and supplies to the Black Hills by way of Yankton and Fort Pierre.⁵⁸

Tom Philips was another Sioux City individual who engaged to some extent in transportation between that city and the Black Hills. On April 14, 1876, he arrived at Custer City, in the Black Hills, with a party of one hundred and sixty-four men.⁵⁹ No definite record of the extent of his activities is available. But he was still engaged in the transportation business in 1877, as the following statement in the *Sioux City Journal* shows:

Persons bound for the Hills are arriving in Sioux City by nearly every train from the east, and already quite a company have assembled here. Tom Philips was engaged yesterday in putting his light train in moving order, though he will probably not get away before Monday next.⁶⁰

Sioux City capitalists were also interested in a project to build a railroad from Sioux City to the Black Hills, by way of the Niobrara Valley of Nebraska. Their idea was not only to secure the trade of the Black Hills for Sioux City but incidentally to tap a rich farming territory. The company, which was known as the Covington, Columbus and Black Hills Railroad, was running trains between

⁵⁸ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, June 15, 1876, February 1, 1877; *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), January 26, 1877; Tallent's *The Black Hills*, p. 190.

⁵⁹ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, April 27, 1876.

⁶⁰ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, February 22, 1877.

Covington and Ponca, Nebraska, by the fall of 1876. Passengers were ferried across the Missouri River to and from Sioux City. Among the citizens of Sioux City prominently interested in this railroad were A. W. Hubbard, Eli Robinson, Wm. Adams, and D. E. Davenport. The company had constructed only twenty-six miles of railroad by 1880 when further construction was suspended.⁶¹ It was not until 1885 that the Black Hills were reached by a railroad. By the end of that year the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad reached Buffalo Gap, and the next year was extended to Rapid City.⁶² The building of this railroad, however, was not a Sioux City enterprise.

The peak of the Black Hills gold rush was reached in the spring of 1877. Commenting on the large numbers who were going to the Hills, the *Sioux City Tribune* said:

The number of Black Hills teams passing through at this early date, is remarkable. Covered wagons are going through town at every hour of the day. The number of men to a wagon will average about three. Besides these, a greater number are going up on boats and by rail to Yankton, who will depend on securing transportation at Fort Pierre. With the present rush to that region there is little danger of trouble with Indians. There will be an army of men extending from the Missouri river to the Hills, for the next four months.⁶³

But this great rush did not continue as long as the *Tribune* predicted, and soon the influx of gold seekers to the Black Hills practically ceased. All the available claims

⁶¹ *Sioux City Weekly Times*, January 1, 1876; *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), November 10, 1876, June 15, 1877; Shuman's *Statistical Report of the Railroads in the United States*, pp. 370, 371, 412, in the *Tenth Census of the United States*, 1880, Vol. IV.

⁶² *Resources of Dakota* (Published by the Dakota Commissioner of Immigration, 1887), pp. 9, 12, 244.

⁶³ *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), April 13, 1877.

had been taken by this time, and nothing was left for newcomers. Writing from the Hills under date of June 4, 1877, W. H. Wright, a special correspondent of the *Sioux City Journal* said, "Immigration has about ceased into the Hills. Those coming in with freight trains say there are none on the road."⁶⁴ Thereafter Sioux City had little direct interest in the Black Hills except to furnish supplies for those who were already in that region.

As has been true in the history of every gold field, the fortunes of the Black Hills gold seekers varied greatly. Some quickly gained the dreamed of wealth, but many more returned from the Hills poorer than when they went, disappointed and embittered by their experiences. The *Northern Vindicator* spoke truthfully when it said, in 1876, that "undoubtedly the first ones in the diggings will go away rich but the majority of those who go had better stay at home and mind their knitting."⁶⁵

As a rule the Sioux City papers published only stories telling of rich gold discoveries, with the purpose of promoting migration to the Hills. Among the successful miners from Sioux City was Thomas E. Phillips who returned to that city after five months in the region. He had "struck it rich" in the Deadwood district, and had a pound and a half of "shot gold" to exhibit as evidence of his good fortune.⁶⁶ His story was typical of many that appeared in the Sioux City papers.

But on one occasion a story of quite a different character was published in the *Tribune*, with the following comment: "In these days when every report reaching us from the Black Hills is freighted with glowing reports of

⁶⁴ *Sioux City Weekly Journal*, June 21, 1877.

⁶⁵ *Northern Vindicator* (Weekly, Estherville), February 5, 1876.

⁶⁶ *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), August 4, 1876.

the richness of the country and the opportunities for money making, it is refreshing to hear the wail of a thoroughly homesick man, who went out with a gunny sack expecting to fill it with the precious metal and get back home a millionaire in a month." It then published a letter written from Custer City, January 20, 1876, by a Denver man to a friend which read as follows:

This is the devil's own country. If you have a grain of charity in your soul, send me \$25. Don't say you haven't it. If you can't get it otherwise, go to church and steal it out of the contribution-box, and then you wouldn't have half the sin on your soul that you will should you leave me here. Bad luck to this country.⁶⁷

These stories show that there were two sides to the Black Hills gold rush. It was only natural in view of the great influx of gold seekers, many of whom had no experience in mining or in facing the hardships of out-door life, that comparatively few should gain wealth while the greater part should fail. Those who failed, on their return from the Hills, sought to create the impression that the whole excitement was a hoax and a humbug. They were not justified in this, for statistics show that a considerable amount of gold was being produced in the Hills at the time the gold fever was at its height. In 1877, it was estimated that the gold secured from quartz amounted to \$1,500,000 and that from placers \$1,000,000.⁶⁸

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⁶⁷ *Sioux City Tribune* (Weekly), March 24, 1876.

⁶⁸ Appletons' *Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1877, pp. 245, 246.