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## A BOY'S EYE VIEW OF THE OLD SOUTHWEST

*By* JAMES K. HASTINGS

**I**N April, 1880, we were living in southern Colorado, at Trinidad. Father was in New Mexico at Silver City, near the Mexican border, and it was decided that we should join him.

New Mexico, with its 121,666 square miles of area, may have had possibly one resident per square mile at that time. There was snow on the ground as we started south through the newly completed Raton tunnel, just over the line in New Mexico on the Santa Fe. When we reached Albuquerque on the Rio Grande, we went into that town on a construction train, said to be the first one into town. Spring had come by that time and there was a riot of roses in the old town. We lay there some days at a Mexican hotel until we could get a coach going south. I can remember seeing a Mexican plowing in the river bottom near Ft. Craig with a pair of tiny oxen and a forked stick for a plow. We had no Indian trouble going down although they passed near us one night. We crossed the "Jornada del Muerto," or Journey of Death with its 90 miles without water. There were stage stations every 20 miles or so on the Jornada. One we stopped at had a high adobe wall surrounding it and there water hauled from the Rio Grande was always kept for travelers. The owner, a woman, had been given they told us four townships of desert land to maintain the station there. We reached Silver City on May 1, 1880, and father met us there.

Father was the superintendent of a quartz mill that crushed the silver ore from two mines, named the '76 and Baltic, located a few miles above town in a small valley on the Continental Divide, known as Chloride Flat. The ore was hauled down from the mines by 4 and 6 mule teams, in giant wagons with boiler plated beds. Silver reduction in a stamp mill is much like any other manufacturing business. The mill ran 24 hours a day for 7 days a week, for about ten months in the year; in the heat of summer they laid

off for repairs. The men worked 12 hours a day and drew good wages. The ore was first crushed to a fine dust with powerful stamps that rose and fell hour after hour, with deafening noise, and this dust was washed into massive pans where it was ground still finer in between or under the monster shoes that worked like the "upper and nether millstones." In the last set of pans, quicksilver was added and it picked up the silver in amalgam, the same that some dentists once used for filling teeth. This silver amalgam was poured into a conical sack of strong canvas and drained of much of the quicksilver in it, just as a farmer's wife of the olden days used to make cottage cheese by twisting the sack until the whey, or quicksilver in this case, was mostly removed. The resulting amalgam was called a "goose egg" and when a batch of these were obtained they were heated in a retort where the fumes were run into a tank of water that chilled the rest of the quicksilver to a fluid state. There was constant weighing of the amalgam to show any losses. We laughed at one man working on the pans once, for he asked when being discharged, "I haven't been stealing anything have I"? The silver on coming from the retort was pure and was in danger of being stolen before being cast into the great bricks. It was often moved to our house in the night for safe keeping. I can remember walking beside my father carrying his Colt's revolver as he and a trustworthy man carried the silver in a hand barrow. Of course if we had been attacked father, and not I, would have used the gun. One night some one evidently drunk tried with a steel bar to pry off our front door and get at our cache of silver. Father stood at the head of the stairs ready to shoot if the man gained entrance. After the quicksilver was roasted from the amalgam the pure silver was cast into monster bricks of 300 pounds or more in weight. These were unwieldy and much smaller ones would have been more convenient, but also more easily stolen. Two express companies, the Adams and the Wells-Fargo, ran Concord coaches from our town to carry the mail, express and passengers to the railroad at Deming, where it had reached within 50 miles of our

town. The morning after we had cast a brick, one of these would stop at the mill and take it to the railroad. Once a 350 lb. brick broke through the coach floor on the desert and all the driver could do was to drive off and leave it. It was safe there for no pack mule could carry it away and a wagon could be tracked by a fast posse. The abandoning of a \$5,000 silver brick in the road did not bother us any, for when it was once signed for by the Wells-Fargo driver, it was their baby.

The Mescalero Apache Indians, under Victorio and Geronimo, were raiding at that time and kept us wondering when they would strike next. Many a rancher was picked off in that day but they never attempted a raid on our camp. There were some cattle ranches about us, but the Indians discouraged them. All food beside range beef, including the staples of flour, potatoes, sugar and such, had to come from the railroad. While the mail coaches could go there and back in a day, sometimes under heavy guard, always changing horses every few miles, the "bull trains," as they were called, took plenty of time to make the round trip. They were owned and run by Mexicans of the border grade and these were easily frightened by an Indian rumor. When they got to good grass and water they would sometimes imagine danger. There they would park their wagons in a great circle and all drivers would guard and graze the cattle by day and yard them in the circle of wagons by night.

No appeal from a hungry people had any effect to get that food started towards town. They wanted a cavalry escort, but the cavalymen were busy elsewhere. I remember that the regular price per hundred pounds by coach, on the well guarded mail to camp from the freighters' wagons was six dollars a hundred pounds for flour and other stuff, besides all that it had cost to get it out from the states. Some of the coaches brought a few sacks of flour in to camp. Most of us lived on a corn-bread diet at such times and had for dessert, sack pudding; neither was there any sugar. I can remember my three year old sister going to the bird cage and getting a lump of sugar from between the wires

and scraping her teeth across it, and with a shake of her curls putting it back with the apparent thought that she must not rob the bird.

Those freighters had good cause to be cautious about the Indians. The saddest sight that I ever saw in a long life was on a Sunday morning when two soldiers came down the street in our town, the end of the coach line, driving two broken down cavalry horses hitched to a coach filled with bullet holes and covered with human blood. The Apaches had jumped the coach about sunrise, near Ft. Cummings, a six company post. The Indians had hid behind the tall Yucca stumps and killed every mortal on the coach. Of course they took the horses and every scrap of leather in the fore and aft boots, and leather mail sacks, probably to patch moccasins. They got away, although the post bugler blew "Boots and Saddles" at the first sound of gun fire. Our mail the next day, from those mail sacks, showed plenty of blood on it. It was thus that the Southwest was settled. Guards were often carried on the coaches when needed. I remember riding all afternoon on top of a swaying Concord coach between two Infantrymen dressed in blue, with their Long Tom rifles at hand, while away to the north on a flat-topped mountain signal fires talked to someone. An Indian of that day could do a lot with a blanket and a smoky camp-fire. He could have dots and dashes galore.

Many men of that day belted on their guns before they drew on their boots mornings, but they did not wear those traffic-cop light belts; rather they were broad cartridge belts, and never drawn up snug, but the gun hung low on the right hip and there was no pulling a gun unless you meant to use it.

Our mill being so far from the others had a complete shop attached, with a carpenter, blacksmith and molder. Stamp shoes were always wearing out with the incessant pounding, and so we ran a cupola to melt our scrap iron with charcoal made back in the hills. One of my jobs, when they melted, was to man the hose on the roof to see that no sparks started a fire. The men generally drenched me down first so as to not get the shirt burned off me. Sometimes they

let me help load the cupola furnace with successive layers of charcoal and iron.

I realize now that I must have been a pest about the mill; with no school to go to I was there much of the time, although I was supposed to study some old school books at home. Once, when I had been too much of a nuisance, Dad asked, "Where are you in arithmetic young man?" I answered, "I have finished it," only to hear him say, "Go home and go through it again." Well I started at common fractions that time.

I had a fine assortment of friends in that camp. We had school for only a month or so, when a traveling school master taught a few of us long enough to get money to move on with.

One of these friends was "Black Billie," an ex-slave, who was a hostler for the mill company. Mother had a large print New Testament and Billie delighted to come down to our house and read aloud from it, for his own and our benefit. He was allowed to take out a small team of mean mules hitched to a wagon without a bed. He generally drove the outfit with loose planks on the running gear. Those mules loved to run away with him, and when they did his remarks were not those that he had found in Holy Writ. There were two Mexican villages in the camp that Dad drew on for unskilled labor. He had a time getting them to work steadily. Many a Sunday morning he would rout me out to feed the stamps until he could get help, as his labourers had gone to a dance they called "a Bilee," the night before, and were not fit for work. Finally, in desperation, he hired some Canton Chinese, and his labour troubles were over.

The carpenter, though old enough to be my father, was my special chum. When I saw him come down the street, trailed by a Chinese, carrying some long iron rods, I beat it to him. His first question was, "Did you ever read Robinson Crusoe, Jim?" Of course I admitted it, and he replied that he was Crusoe, and that his rear guard was Friday. From that hour, the man answered to that name. On the Chinese New Years, which comes in the Spring, he deluged us with presents. My brother and I got firecrackers, and the

girls Chinese candy, while Dad who never used tobacco got a box of what in China must correspond to "Wheeling Stogies." I tried one once and quit for life.

Bill Green, the teamster hauling ore from the mine, was a good man and an especial friend. He and his near wheeler, "Old Beck," saved my life once. I had been up to the mine where I had been flagging for the surveyor on a survey in the mine. You will understand that in mine surveying a candle is the flag, instead of the red and white painted pole used on the surface. The engineer and Green were on the wagon seat coming down the mountain with a load of ore, and I was precariously seated on the seat-back with my back to theirs when we jolted over a stone and I was thrown under the hind wheel. In a mule team of that day the best animal is the wheeler to the left of the pole, known as the "near wheeler." This place was filled by Beck, a monster black, and when Green yelled to her, she froze in her breeching and held the team from moving. The wagon and load likely totaled five tons. In my fall, I had struck on the backs of both hands and sprained my wrists and lay in the track against the mountain slope helpless. There was a much used liniment for sale in the camp, for man and animals. The only kind they had on hand was for animals only, and was a dark brown, so I was as brown as a Malay for a while.

One of my friends of those days on the Mexican Border was the Negro cook at the mine. He certainly knew his stuff and I have never eaten better meals. When the shaft whistle on the mine hoist blew, he was ready and his welcome cry of "come and get it," was always answered by a rush of hungry miners. One thing that endeared him to my boyish heart was that he was not fussy about clean hands and combed hair. Boy like I enjoyed teasing him and I early found that he had a horror of the deep shafts in the mine and so I would wheedle him to go down in the shaft with me. His stock answer was, "No sah, Mister Jimmie, I can go out the doah and dig a hole six inches deep and get into that and it is deep enough for me."

I remember that the '76 ore shaft was covered with two heavy six inch wooden doors and at times when there was

need of haste some one would go down in the ore bucket, but no one ever came up in it, for the various engineers seemed to try to see which could "whip" a bucket of ore out the fastest, and how those doors would flash open and the bucket would stop just before it went over the shive wheel at top. Often there were a dozen Mexican ore sorters working on the floor of the shaft house, endeavoring to get the refuse culled from the rich ore. Really they did pretty well for themselves, for beside their wages they often kept their small smelter near our house going nights, smelting the richer ore they had stolen. This furnace was called an "arasta" and the fuel was charcoal, burned in the hills and brought in on burros. The forced draft was from an old blacksmith's bellows that one man with a raw hide loop for his foot pumped for hours on end. There was little hope of keeping up with ore sorters of that day without an X-ray, and we knew nothing of them 70 years ago.

Three of the older white miners had dug back into the mountain above the shaft house to get a dug-out to live in and one of them kept dinging at me to send up a carpenter's square on one of the ore wagons, so he could get a door made to keep out the cold fall nights up there on the Continental Divide.

I can remember, when we made a survey of the surface of some of those mines, how father marked them by hewn stones a foot square and 4 feet long. They stuck like a sore thumb and were easily seen from a distance, so there was no question where property lines were.

Our camp was the first town in that day from the Mexican Border (before the railroad came), perhaps 100 miles away and we had a custom house. Mexican horsemen who came past our house direct from their country with a bunch of skinny fowls dangling from their saddles, asked us two reals or 25 cents each for them, plus the customs tax. We often wondered if the custom house ever saw that tax. The regular freighters used ordinary wagons, but there were a few of the monster ox drawn two wheeled carts with wooden wheels that were used in smuggling. In ordinary use the spindles were never greased and made a wail to be heard



for miles, so when grease was applied to stop the noise it was almost prima facie evidence that smuggling was going on.

Often mule pack trains would come up to the custom house with produce to load back with goods. I once found a few pairs of what I later found were called in the slums of our great cities, "Saturday night shoes," that had lost out of such a pack. The sight of that shoddy stuff sickened this boy.

The mules in a pack train were let run loose and herded along the trail or road. They generally had an old gray bell mare that all the mules would stay with. When they wanted to catch the mules to load or unload them, they would close-herd them and four or more would hold a rawhide lariat up three feet from the ground and one muleteer would grab a mule and slip a broad leather blind over his eyes. This took all fight out of him.

Once father hired a Mexican with a big wheeled cart to haul a load of rock salt for use at the mill. The man came back asking for "une camesa por le carro." He meant a shirt for the cart, or wagon sheet, fearing that a shower might come up and he lose the salt.

There was one story of those wild days on the border that always thrilled me. The Apaches had crawled up and surprised the family in a Mexican jacal or hogan and killed everyone present. But they did not wipe out the family by so doing, for there was a slip of a 12 year old girl out herding the sheep. Those runty specimens, having a pound or two of wool on them, were little kin to our Merinos or Shrops of today, and it took one both young and fleet of foot to manage them and the small shepherdess was just that. The Indians knew of her being in the hills and wanted both her and the sheep and so started after her. Though desert bred and fast on their feet, they were no match for the feet in those small moccasins; they simply were not in her class, as they found, when she walked off and left them, never to be caught.

Near the quartz mill that father used to run, he owned a garden plot of a few acres, irrigated from the same stream

that supplied the mill boilers with water. This he rented to some Cantonese Chinese who used it for a truck garden and raised vegetables for the camp. The first season they had it, they carried their produce to market in baskets hung from yokes over their shoulders. They made a picturesque sight in their conical hats as they went along in single file, sing-singing to each other like a lot of grackle black birds. The next season, they got a decrepit horse and an old market wagon, so that one could sell the stuff and leave the rest at home to work. The driver knew about as much about horses as I do about atomic energy. One day, when the salesman had reached our house on his return trip from market, he discovered that the horse had something in a hind hoof. Instead of picking up the hoof to investigate, he crawled under the wagon and began working on the hoof, when the horse kicked him in the head, laying him out cold. My older sister, just a kid, was doing the dishes in the kitchen, but hearing the wagon stop, came to the door to investigate, when she saw that the man was out, she hurried back into the house, got the water pail, pulled the man from under the wagon by his feet and drenched him with cold water. In time he recovered and getting on the wagon went on home. The next day after selling his load, he stopped at our house and, on his knocking, mother went to the door and the Chinese said, "Me tankie you boy." Lord Chesterfield himself could do no better.

The sister, when grown to womanhood, won an education and became a Doctor of Medicine. Haven't we read somewhere about the boy being father to the man? Wouldn't that apply to the girl also?

One of the danger spots of that day was Cook's Canyon. We came down through it one dark night with a big Concord coach, attempting to be quiet, so as to not arouse any lurking Indians. We passed the graves, or grave rather, of 17 killed from a wagon train. Our efforts to be quiet failed, for the brakes on the coach had been shod with old miner boot soles and the nails in them against the steel tires made a screech that could be heard for miles. We all followed the coach except my grown sister who, holding the baby sister,

rode in the coach. Later, when I was coming back from the survey of some mining claims for patent, we came through the canyon in the day time and boy like I crawled back into the rear of the wagon and went to sleep. When I awoke, the wagon was standing still and I heard gun fire. I could see nothing from where I lay and suspected Indians, so did not move or raise up until I heard our colored teamster Dan say, "I got two of them." Then I looked to see that it was rabbits instead of Indians that he meant. Two friendly Apache scouts from another tribe in Arizona came along and cooked their rabbit over our fire. They did this without an atom of cleaning and then ate it, with such cleaning of the offal as they could do with a twig. They had red handkerchiefs about their heads or necks to distinguish them from warriors. They were armed with Winchesters, which with magazines loaded made a heavy gun, so each carried two small wyths that were bound together at the middle for a gun rest. A clumsy arrangement for a fighting man, I thought.

My daily routine when I was a boy in the mining camp was hardly a routine, for few days were alike, but I did keep the water pails full. To do that I had to go to the St. Vincent spring where most of the women of the nearby Mexican village were gossiping and filling their pails and helping hoist them to the other's head. It was the stories that we had from the Bible and pictures of that time over again. I do not remember ever seeing a man come for water. It was beneath them. If you had learned Border Spanish you would have gotten an ear full. I used two discarded black powder cans with bails in them for my water pails. They held 3 or 4 gallons each and were pretty heavy when full. Another early morning job was watching the Concord coaches leave town for the railroad. There was often a race to see which of the fresh teams would be in the lead when they passed our house on the edge of town. My friend of the ore hauling days, Bill Green, had been promoted to driving for the Adams Express Co., and I was naturally rooting for him. The Wells Fargo driver had four small mules and how he escaped turning over when he tried to pass Green was a mystery to me. Green was a gentleman, and father told of his turning his 4 horses

out so as to avoid crushing a terrapin in a wheel rut, but grinding right over a rattlesnake in one.

The Mexicans brought in wood (stove length) on burros (donkeys). It was packed in a great circle over the beast's back, and when it was sold the muleteer pulled one thong from the raw hide rope holding it on and it all fell to the ground leaving the burros to walk out of the pile. We had a fireplace and so occasionally father would get a cord or two of 4 foot wood, such as he used under the steam boilers at the mill. When it was dumped at our kitchen door, I knew it was my job to fit it for fireplace or kitchen stove. By the way, that is one of the best exercises that I know of for a boy to do.

A saw buck and a sharp saw has it over some gymnasiums that I know of. Seeing that wood cut and neatly piled comes under the head of the "glory of achievement" that some educators tell of. When that wood was neatly ricked near the kitchen door I was again free to go afield.

The mill would not buy scrap iron from the Mexicans, but they would of me and trust me to weigh it. There had been another mill and foundry across the creek from ours and removed long ago. I discovered that there was considerable iron in small pieces in their slag pile. I got an old Mexican partner and found a ton or more of iron there. We were paid 2 cents a pound for it. Should I add that I learned to swim in that shallow creek? There was a lot of broken glass and other trash and it was not deep in any place, but I learned to swim dog fashion.

While waiting for repair material at the quartz mill, two of the older mill men took me south to the Tres Hermanos, or Three Sister's mountains, near where in later years stood the town of Columbus, New Mexico, that Pancho Villa once sacked and burned in hopes of getting our country into war with Mexico. We camped on a bench near the top of one mountain and a large area of northern Mexico lay spread out before us when the sun rose the next morning. One of the men in stirring around before morning had set off his gun which we kept under the covers. This did not awaken me, but the cold air when they threw off the blankets to put out

the fire did that. Mountain air, good food, and a tired boy made me dead to the world.

When on one of my survey trips, two Mexican hunters came along and sold us some meat of a black bear that they had killed. It was too tough and strong to eat. They were professional hunters and had caps made of antelope horns and enough of the hide on the neck to make a cap to slip over the head to stalk game with. When they sat in the tall grass with those horned heads showing, they would fool anyone, especially an antelope, for you know they are as curious as a woman.

On one survey on west slope of the Rockies, in the Mogollon mountains of New Mexico, I saw some of the grandest scenery that I ever beheld: high cliffs with brawling mountain brooks filling the canyons below, the sound made by the waters tumbling over the rocky beds rising far up on the mountain slopes; and great pine trees and some times box canyons that hemmed us in until we had to turn around and retrace our steps to get out. The Apaches had been there the year before and left the signs of their presence, as was the great cairn of stones in a stream bed at the end of a trail down the mountain made up of boot and moccasin tracks over the loose sliding shale of the mountain side. They were all that was left to show of the unsuccessful race made by some lone prospector. The pile of smoked stones showed where he had stood when he was lashed to the stake. We respected his resting place and monument.

All of these signs were before me as I sat on the ground beside the engineer and his transit. It would bring me out of a reverie to have him say, "Jim check on my figures," and I would do sums for him. In that day that country had not been surveyed, so there was no way of describing the exact location of a tract of land or a mining claim, except by tying it in by triangulation to two or more mountain peaks or other natural objects. One night the camp put on a celebration of some event of more or less importance, the reason for which I have forgotten. They likely had absorbed more or less liquid refreshment from the commissary and were duly exhilarated and had built a huge campfire near the

camp's center among the lofty pines. They had gotten out three blacksmith anvils and would pour a handful of black powder on one and stack the other two on top of it and then fire the powder with a long half inch rod that had been heated in the fire. The anvils would bounce into the air with a roar and the process would be repeated. The noise made was a good imitation of the firing of a cannon.

There were only two women in the camp at that time. One ran the tiny boarding house where we ate. The racket that the men made that night must have disturbed the women a lot.

The boarding house keeper was no cook, much as we needed one, perhaps because she had nothing to do with, for her biscuits were always undone inside and caused the engineer, who had drunk his share and some other man's portion of whisky, much pain. I got away with the grub, for I was young and tough. When I could not get enough at the table, I haunted a nearby turnip patch and so survived. When we got in late one night, we found the one room of the cabin lighted by a small dish of grease set on a high cupboard with a lighted strip of cloth hanging from one side of the pan for a light. The family were from the mountain section of the South and the mother always rocked her baby in a common hickory chair, without rockers, and yelled an ancient ballad at him. The kid seemed to thrive on it.

One old character named "Jed" would have delighted movie audiences of today. I never heard of his working and, while he wore the boots of that day, I never saw his trousers either tucked neatly in or hung outside of that foot wear. They were hung on one boot strap, so they sagged the boot top down, but he could go down a rocky mountain trail and glancing across the canyon to a blank wall opposite, stumbling as he went, count the window panes, "46, 47, 48," not yet broken out of the supposed vacant building opposite, as he had when on his way to school when a boy. He likely was pretty worthless, but boy like I did not think so. When we went in there, we turned our team loose to graze and find their feed where they could, as there were no fences. When our work was done \$5.00 was offered for finding the team.

I wanted to start for home and started out to find them if possible. When Jed heard what I planned, he would not let me leave camp until I buckled on his gun. How he must have missed that artillery. I had not gone a mile from camp in the big woods until I found a fawn half eaten, lying in my path. I judged that it had been the work of a panther and then remembered that I had read that they dropped from trees onto their prey and my taste for \$5.00 and a trip home weakened in short order.

Our camp in the Mogollon mountains had only three or four horses, the mine manager's, the boarding house, and the "Old Boar's Den," where several of the miners lived and cooked for themselves. These three houses were at the corners of a triangle and the lodge pole pines in the grove between were cut so the people in each house could see how the others fared during a siege. All the houses were of logs and the windows were filled with small logs with only a hole left between them to fire through. The Apaches had been there the year before and gotten some of the men that were away from camp. None appeared while we were there.

On our three days drive home we met men who, with the hospitality of the West, shared a deer with us that they had just killed. They had never seen us before, or would again likely. That night we toasted those tender steaks of venison over our camp fire while our biscuit baked in the embers beside the fire. It was the finest food ever. Then to bed on the ground with a buffalo robe over us on top of the blankets while my engineer friend taught me astronomy from the skies above, till sleep came. It was on that trip that a magnificent black tail buck came near to camp and stood and watched us, with those great antlers raised in the air. I will never again deride a man for having "buck fever." It would be a crime to shoot that majestic creature.

As this draws to a close I must say in defense of the Indians that most of the white men of that day and area were as fine as one could ask for, but some to my knowledge were just scum and they by their actions caused the Indians to hate the Whites and that hatred was often taken out on defenseless people.

To illustrate the above let me give an example. The forts of that day that I was familiar with were not walled or stockaded, but were simply posts on an open field. They had to be to permit the cavalry troops to maneuver in drill. My father told me an incident at one such post that used a log cabin for a guard house and in it was an Apache Indian confined for some misdemeanor. There was a bed in one corner of the room and the Indian was asleep on the bed next the wall. Some of the soldiers had a camp fire near the cabin and one of the less desirable ones heated a steel rifle cleaning rod in the fire and then stuck it in between the logs and burned the sleeper. In his pain and fright he dashed out the door and was promptly shot and killed by the guard, who naturally believed that the prisoner was attempting an escape. When Chief Cochise, friendly to the whites, heard of it he swore that he would make the "trail run red from Taos to Tucson," and figuratively speaking he did just that.

I can remember one day when seated on a mountain top I, a 13 year old flagman, saw below me the valley of the Rio Grande, and the river winding through it showed like a white thread on the floor. From the same lofty perch I could see through the clear air the smoke of the construction trains of both the Santa Fe and the Southern Pacific. They were building the lines that when they met would span the continent. As a boy I was permitted to see the nation growing. No one dreamed in that faraway day of the stature it would attain today.