D’em Flormann Boys by Jerry Bryant

When most Black Hills Historians come across the name “Flormann,” one of two major, regional events flashes in their minds: the Greenwood Mining Swindle, or the Big Bend/Fort Meade Hydraulic Mining Scandal. Armed with the names of those two events, the inquisitive reader can investigate the purported negative impact of Robert Flormann on the Black Hills for days. The intent of this brief paper, however, is to examine the positive side of a would-be empire builder who was stricken with a fatal disease: Gold Fever.

Robert Flormann was the elder of two brothers who immigrated to the United States from Dusseldorf, Germany in the last half of the 19th century. Robert was born in 1835 and his brother, Charles was born 1841. While it is not known where the Flormann Brothers acquired their mining expertise, it is known that the brothers worked their way across the United States at other professions than mining. Robert Flormann worked in fine pastries for a time while in Denver, and Charles was a saloon keeper. The brothers were probably exposed to precious metals prospecting while in Denver. Between 1858 and 1916 Denver supported a large enclave of ethnic Germans. The German community in Denver utilized the saloon as the center of their social, political and economic activities. Often these establishments also housed other vital community functions, such as bakeries. Thus, with one brother baking and the other pouring, Denver must have been very comfortable for the Florimann boys.

In gold camps throughout the West the Flormann name became associated with the quest for gold and silver. Before coming to the Black Hills, Robert’s ventures took him and his wife, Ernestine, to the fields in Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, and New Mexico. Small hints left behind, such as the birth records of his daughter Francis in Colorado, a son, Louise in Montana, and a daughter, Florence in New Mexico, give us a brief but accurate image of a man who was dedicated to his wife and adored by his children. Charles and his wife, Frederica, had three children prior to coming to the Black Hills, two in Colorado and one in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Robert first entered the Black Hills from the south, coming north out of Fort Russell near Cheyenne in 1875. With a
grubstake from Major Wooley, the Post Trader at Fort Russell, he initially prospected along French Creek for placer gold and indications of quartz. His prospecting efforts brought him north where he arrived on Spring Creek near what is now Hill City on July 14. When he arrived at Spring Creek there was already an active mining camp in existence named “Hillyo.” One of the miners at the Hillyo camp during this period described Robert: “The Ruling spirit seemed to be a big verbose German, Floorman by name. He had a splendid four horse team and a big Bain Wagon heavily loaded.”

Indications are that Robert was a close friend to the former Mayor of Cheyenne, Mark V. Boughton and his partner Berry. Boughton and Berry had a sawmill in storage in Cheyenne. Flormann introduced the men around camp and informed them that with a little encouragement Boughton and Berry would bring their sawmill to the banks of Spring Creek. The fact of the matter was that the decision had already been made, and Berry had already chosen a site for his mill. By January of 1876 the two merchants were already building on the banks of Spring Creek. During the winter, when little mining could be done, Robert Flormann and three other men, Miller, Harvey and McCullough platted the town site and organized the mining district along Spring Creek. During this same period of time, Robert’s younger brother Charles was living in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Robert’s stay in the Hills thus far had convinced him that the rush was not just a flash in the pan. He was convinced that there was money to be made, and he was going to be part of it. That spring he returned to Denver for his family. April of 1876 found Robert, his wife, three children and their dog returning to the Black Hills through Red Canyon, their wagons loaded with their family possessions. Robert, now a seasoned veteran of the Hills, was acting as the guide for a small wagon train of mostly men coming to the Hills to prospect.

On the 24th of April the wagon train came upon the Metz massacre. Metz had been a successful baker who had sold his business in Custer City. He had found the Black Hills a little too rough for his family and was returning south to farm. He was accompanied by his wife, a wagon driver/guide and a black woman who worked as the Metz’s cook. As with Flormann, coming north from Denver, Metz was traveling south with everything he owned in several wagons. A frugal man, Metz had saved a large portion of the money he had earned while in Custer in addition to the $2,000 he made when he sold his bakery. The Flormann party found the Metz party dead. They had been attacked, killed and robbed. The contents of their wagons were strewn across the massacre site, as though a planned deliberate search had been conducted. The prospectors, miners and businessmen who were accompanying the Flormann train, panicked, and were going to make a run for Custer City, when Flormann pulled his revolver and threatened to shoot any man who deserted them. The men were afraid that the “Indians” were still lurking about, and did not want to risk another attack. In the end they were more afraid of Flormann than the “Indians,” and stayed to help take the Metz bodies to town. Ernestine Flormann prepared Mrs. Metz for the trip, but the cook, was not found that day. She was found later, some distance from the Metz family, with an arrow in her back and five dollars still clutched in her hand. After returning the black lady to town for a proper burial, the five dollars found its way to the local saloon where it purchased a round for the search party. While in Custer, Robert spread the word that he did not believe that Indians had attacked the Metz party. None of the Metz cash was found at the massacre site. Robert was of the opinion that the train
RECENT ARTICLES RELATED to BLACK HILLS HISTORY


Todd tells the story of a person better known as “Aunt Lou.” She came to the Black Hills in 1876, and lived in the area until her death in 1911. During this time she worked as a cook, hotel owner, and rancher. Gunther concludes that Marchbanks “worked diligently to live her own life on her own terms, to the greatest extent possible” (25).


Terry covers the complete history of the tourist line. The 1880 Train began as a dream of William Heckman in 1956, with the first narrow gauge train running in 1957. Through the years the railroad has had many ups and downs, and Terry calls the sale to Robert and Joanna Warder in 1990 “a new beginning.” He concludes by discussing the latest improvements: the purchase of the 2-6-6-2T, and the rebuilding of the line to Keystone.


This issue contains nine articles that deal with aspects of Wild Bill’s life. Most are written by the experts: Joseph G. Rosa and Thadd M. Turner.

South Dakota Magazine has been running stories related to the Homestake closing. The March/June 2001 issue has two articles. More recently, the July/August edition as a piece on the future of Spearfish Creek by Paul Higbee.

Keep an eye out for the Fall/Winter 2001 issue of South Dakota History. This will be a special issue on the 125th anniversary of the Black Hills gold rush.

If you see an article related to Black Hills history, would you please forward the information to the editor. We can only mention what we know of. Thanks.

BOOKNOTES

Hot Off The Presses
By R. A. Meeks, Deadwood

Those interested in the life and times of James Butler Hickok (a.k.a. Wild Bill) will be glad to learn of two new titles out this year. Joseph G. Rosa’s Wild Bill Hickok, Gunfighter (Creative Publishing Company, 2001) examines Hickok’s extraordinary skill as a gunfighter, with detailed looks at the various encounters that made Hickok famous in his own lifetime. With his usual thorough research and exposition, Rosa also examines (with an abundance of maps, pictures, and diagrams) the weapons of the period, as well as the other people involved in the conflicts, from Hickok’s friends to his mortal enemies.

Wild Bill Hickok, Deadwood City - End of Trail (Old West Alive! Publishing, 2001), by Montana resident Thadd Turner, reveals painstaking research into the last days of Wild Bill in 1876 Deadwood. Turner’s initial interest in the civilian scouts of the American West after the Civil War soon focused on one of their number: James Butler Hickok. Initially planning to spend only a summer in Deadwood looking for a few answers, Turner ended up spending over two years engaged in research about Wild Bill and the establishment and growth of Deadwood City. Turner quickly realized that to learn more about Hickok’s last days would mean learning more about Deadwood in 1876, a town, as he puts it, “under construction.”

Also of Interest:

Willard Larson has privately published two books on Black Hills Mining History.

“Golden Dream of Yesterday,” and “Early Mills in the Black Hills.” The first book has 12 stories that have interested Will over the years. The “Mills” book is an annotated list of early gold mills in the Hills. Will found 333 milling operations!

For more information contact Will Larson at POB 338, Isanti, MN 55040.
ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE NEWS:

HE WHO WOULD ENJOY HIS DINNER SHOULD NOT LOOK OVER THE KITCHEN WALL: Leftovers of Deadwood’s Chinatown

By Rose Estep, Senior Archaeologist
State Historical Society, Archaeological Research Center

Deadwood has a diverse cultural heritage that contributes significantly to the historical integrity of the city’s genuine past. The multicultural character of Deadwood is reflected in the archaeological remains of a Chinese community, resulting in a phenomenal window into Deadwood’s early history. Preliminary archaeological investigations conducted at 39LA3000-CL, referred to as the Chicken Louie site, resulted in the discovery of intact features and rich artifact deposits representing the Chinese population in the decades spanning the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

Archaeological evaluations commenced in early July following the demolition and razing of an on-site structure once known as Louie’s Chicken Hut. This restaurant was established in the 1930s and was owned and operated by an Afro-American couple, Louis and Jackie Banks. After a visit to the site and encountering what appeared to be artifacts associated with a Chinese population, brief research of the Chinese in the Black Hills, and studying Sanborn Insurance maps of early Deadwood, it was reasonably certain that the site was located within what was called Chinatown in the early years of Deadwood. Commissioners of the City of Deadwood, Deadwood’s Preservation Officer and archaeologists all agreed that mitigation of this site would contribute significantly to early ethnic history of the city.

Data collected from this site will reveal an irreplaceable piece of history that occurred in a short period of Deadwood’s history. The archaeological record will provide an opportunity to assess some of the Chinese community’s adaptive responses to early life in Deadwood and a distinctive traditional culture. Some of the questions that will be addressed will be: How did the Chinese population adapt to the social, economic and environmental conditions and the demographic constraints while maintaining traditional beliefs, customs and practices? Do their practices reflect patterns of acculturation? Were there other ethnic groups living among the Chinese? Does the archaeological record reflect social conditions of class, gender and ethnicity; and trade, economy and sociocultural change? Tactical field methodology includes opening trenches that cross the site north to south and east to west resulting in wall profiles that may reveal several brief events such as the devastating fire of 1879, the great flood of 1883 and other events yet undiscovered.

There have been very little archaeological investigations of ethnic communities in South Dakota and none on the Overseas Chinese. The remnants at this site may very well be the last remaining evidence of the extraordinary Chinese community of early Deadwood. This study will add to the growing knowledge of Overseas Chinese settlements on the western frontier. Deadwood has a very colorful past and the city of Deadwood is helping to expose that color before it fades away.

Also of Interest:

A number of archaeological digs were sponsored this past summer in the Hills. These included:

In June, the Adams Museum and U.S. Forest Service cosponsored an archaeological field school. With the assistance of Mike Fosha of the Archaeological Research Center and State
Compliance Officer, Steve Littlefield, 20 students worked at a site near Mt. Roosevelt called Roosevelt Meadows. Here they discovered artifacts that spanned human activity from the gold rush era through the Depression.

In July a dozen Native American young people investigated a site south of Lead looking for early habitation. They uncovered projectile points from 7500 B.C. This dig was cosponsored by the Youth Conservation Corps and U.S. Forest Service.

Upcoming events:

In September the U. S. Forest Service will sponsor a “stabilization project” of Curran’s Cabin. The project near Rochford will replace rotten logs in a 100 year old miner’s cabin. Contact Jerry Bryant at the Spearfish Forest Service Office: 722-0681.

On September 1, the Forest Service will sponsor another “moon walk.” This evening adventure will be at the Roubaix CCC camp.

MUSEUM AND ORGANIZATION NEWS & NOTES:

Adams House and Museum continues an active schedule. Recently they have unveiled the Verne P. Haass Family Education Center, held programs such as producing Midsummer Night’s Dream at the mansion, and opened a World War II display at the Museum. Adams H&M has a support group and newsletter, phone 576-3724.

The Black Hills Mining Museum sponsored a very successful Cornish heritage program last Spring, and Don Toms promises other programs in the future. The Museum will again be open Tuesday through Saturday this winter from 9 to 4:30.

D. C. Booth Fish Hatchery and Society are finishing the “fish-car” which is a replica of a railroad car used by the Department of Commerce to transport fish from 1890 to 1947.

In August the Hatchery is sponsoring a Victorian Garden Party, and in December decorations celebrating a Victorian Christmas. For info call 642-7730.

Butte County Historical Society recently completed a 2 day trip to DeSmet and the Laura Ingalls Wilder home. The group has also finished placing 30 historical markers at abandoned post offices in Butte County, the society next is locating the rural schools with the intention of compiling a book.

The society holds a general meeting three times a year, the next will probably be in October. Contact De Johnson: 456-2938.

The Case Library at Black Hills State University recently received the military papers of Colonel Clarence Dougherty from Betty Anderson. Plus, the library has processed the papers of the Society of American Foresters in South Dakota, and is entering information about the Wharf map collection on the library’s homepage.

The Custer County Historical Society recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Custer County Courthouse Museum. The courthouse dates from 1881 and is undergoing major renovation. The Society has a number of other projects as well, including a 25th anniversary Wagon-Wheel Signature Quilt.

The Society meets the first Saturday of most months at 2PM in the Custer County Courthouse Annex. For more call Jesse Sundstrom at 673-2443.

The Hot Springs Mammoth Site opened a new exhibit area in May, and recently hosted Earthwatch Excavations. 52 mammoths have been discovered so far.

The Journey Museum will hold “Wild West Days” on September 15-16. Historical reenactors will portray such people as Wild Bill and Laura Ingalls Wilder. A buffalo feed is planned for September 16, Sunday. Admission will be charged. Call Gary at 394-1881 or journey@journey museum.org.

The Keystone Area Historical Society meets the last Monday of every month at 7 p.m. at the Senior Center. The society is again sponsoring the West River History Conference. It will run September 27-29, Thursday through Saturday at the Keystone Community Center. Info: Bob Hayes: 666-4630 or Betty Jo: 666-4824.

The Lawrence County Historical Society took a tour through the historic towns of Deadwood Gulch in June. Led by “Cousin Jerr” the group stopped at numerous historic and natural sites.

The next tour is scheduled for September
9, and the next meeting for Sunday, October 7 in Deadwood. Both programs will deal with some aspect of Homestake’s history. For more info: Jerry Wickstrom: 722-0981.

The Spearfish Area Historical Society meets the first Tuesday of each month at 7:30 in the Spearfish Senior Center. The September meeting will be French Bryant discussing the Franklin Hotel. Pres.: Rand Williams 722-7204.

The Westerners will meet on Sunday, September 9 at the Phil-Town Restaurant in Sturgis for a noon luncheon meeting. Miles Gilbert will speak on Buffalo Hunters. Westerners strive to preserve & stimulate interest in frontier history. Call Pastor Olson: 347-2772 or 347-2713.

If your group has not be included, we apologize for the oversight. Send along some information and we shall include it next time. Thanks.

AWARDS AND HONORS

We are pleased to recognize the following:

The Adams Museum and House won a Governor’ Award from the South Dakota State Historical Society in April for outstanding efforts in the sharing and preservation of South Dakota history.

Paul Higbee of Spearfish won a Governor’s Award from the South Dakota State Historical Society for his dedication and commitment to excellence in the interpretation, preservation and advancement of South Dakota history.

Historic South Dakota Foundation gave the Lown Mercantile building and its owner, Todd Crowe, an “Award for Excellence in Historic Rehabilitation.”

Robert E. “Bob” Hayes of Keystone was recognized at the 2001 Dakota Conference in Sioux Falls for his “Distinguished Contribution to the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of South Dakota and the Great Plains.”

RESEARCH NOTES

If you are working on a project, we will be happy to include a few lines. The idea is to stimulate an exchange of ideas and information.

Rick Mills is working on another railroad book. This one is on the Crouch Line, aka, Rapid Canyon Line (among other things.) Any info for Rick: rmills@blackhillsvisitor.com

Jerry Bryant is studying Daniel T. Potter and needs help. Potter apparently homesteaded in 1892, but was also a lawyer and politician throughout the Northern Hills. Any information? Contact Jerry: archeomoos@aol.com

R. A. Meeks is researching the life and work of R. D. Jennings, M.D. If you have anything contact: scribbler01@yahoo.com

The City of Deadwood wants any info, books, articles, pictures, etc., on Chinese in Deadwood or the Black Hills.

TIDBITS

The City of Deadwood has recently purchased the John Sogge Collection which consists of detailed, hand-carved sculptures of Western scenes. The collection can be seen at the Deadwood Visitors Center.

The 1880 Train has been running its 2-6-6-2T mallet from Hill City to Keystone. Numbered 110, this type of engine is rare, and has been attracting much attention.

A section of the ’76 trail that carried miners from Deadwood to Tinton has been opened as a hiking trail from the floor to the rim of Spearfish Canyon.

The Deadwood Historic Preservation Office recently purchased an 1892 map of Deadwood. Twelve feet long, it currently hangs in City Hall.

The City of Deadwood has acquired a variety of Western artifacts from Deadwood businessman and historian Don Clowser.

The Historic Homestake Opera House has recently received grants from Montana-Dakota Utilities and South Dakota Arts Council for its restoration efforts.

The City of Deadwood has purchased a Termesphere for the Visitors Center that will depict 1876 Deadwood.

The State Department of Game, Fish and Parks is designing 27 interpretive signs for the Mickelson Trail.

The Winkelmann Cabin on Deadwood’s Main Street, built in 1923 by the Juso Brothers, will be moved to the Days of ’76 grounds.

D’em Flormann Boys, from Page 2:

had been searched too methodically for Indians and that Indians would not have
taken money or gold.

Robert continued on to Deadwood. After examining all of the resources in the area, he purchased Placer Claim Number 11 above Discovery. The owner of Claim No. 10, George Stokes, stated that Flormann had established a cabin on Claim No. 11 for his wife and children. Stokes went on to describe Mrs. Flormann as a good German wife who believed in the “three German K’s – Kinder, Kuchen and Kirche, Children Cooking and Church.” Stokes went on to say that while she didn’t find much church in the area, she had several children and was a prize cook. The news of the day on 23 September 1876 was that “Bob Floorman” had discovered a 40 to 60 foot wide bed of clay and gravel that crossed claim No. 11 diagonally, and it was showing good color.

Accompanying Robert to the Deadwood area was Boughton, Berry, and their sawmill. The sawmill was initially set up in what is now the location of the Lawrence County Court House. One of the problems in a gold rush environment was the establishment of a consistent value on gold. In June of 1877 Boughton and Berry joined a coalition of Deadwood merchants that fixed the price of gold in Deadwood at $18.00.

Robert’s brother Charles also moved from Cheyenne in 1877, and established the Star Saloon in Gayville. His saloon was located across the street from the Pacific Hotel, and Charles described himself in a large advertisement as, “a master of mixing up of as reliable a drink as can be found in the Hills.” Throughout the year of 1877 Robert Flormann became a common source of print for local newspapers when he bonded the Rutherford B. Hayes Mine, and the Yellow Jacket No. 2.

George Stokes, who owned Placer Claim #10, noted that Robert had a habit of hiring other miners to do some of his prospecting, and that in 1877 he had at least two prospectors working for him in the Bear Butte/ Galena district. In February of that year Robert had made claim to the “Florence Lode.” Named after his youngest daughter, Florence, his new discoveries were so important that a new town was established at the confluence of Spring Run and Bear Butte Creek called Virginia City. Because of its location by the Flormann claims and on the new road to Ft. Pierre, Virginia City was touted as being one of the most desirable places in the Hills. Less than a week later, Robert’s workers had driven the Florence Tunnel to a depth of 80 feet and was reported to have 10 tons of ore in his dump that would average $2000.00 a ton. Robert was now earnestly looking for “capitalists” to invest in his findings. By April 15, 1877, Robert had sold Placer Claim No. 11 in Deadwood, in order to devote all of his time to the Galena diggings and the Black Hills Weekly Times reported that “the new owners of No. 11 are running on Floorman’s old tailings. It pays $10.00 a day to the man.”

Newspaper accounts of Flormann’s Galena prospects are sometimes confusing, often referring to the Florence Mine and then later talking of the Flormann Mine. The one thing that becomes very clear is that Robert was well diversified in his Galena ventures. The first “capitalist” to invest in Robert’s Galena holding was “Capt.” Davies, who purchased the Florence Mine for $50,000. By September of 1878 the Flormann mine announced its plans to erect a silver mill in Strawberry Gulch. Every few weeks the newspapers would run a story on the Flormann Mines and prospects, just being on the same hill as the Flormann properties made a mine newsworthy. In November of 1878 the Flormann shaft had reached a depth of 500 feet, and was reporting paying ore.

The Galena mining profits were used to develop other properties, and by 1880 Robert had diversified even farther. He gained control of the Ft. Meade Hydraulic Co., and he was looking to the east for investors. Robert was constructing a large
tunnel on Rapid Creek to provide the company with sufficient water pressure to run the monitors used in hydraulic placer mining.

In part II: Robert participates in railroad ventures, the Fort Meade Hydraulic Co., the Greenwood Mill, the gold rush to British Columbia, and takes his family to Alaska.

(Editor's note: Footnotes exist for this article but have been omitted because of space limitations. They can be provided on request.)

THANKS

We at Case Library would like to thank the Friends of Case Library, the Deadwood Historic Preservation Office and the Keystone Area Historical Society for their generous support. Our goal is to establish connections among people, organizations, and libraries involved in Black Hills history. We know there are omissions, and possibly errors, for those we apologize. If you have something to submit, please send it along, we are interested in anything related to Black Hills history. This newsletter is being sent to you at no cost, but financial contributions are certainly welcome as well. Thanks. David A. Wolff, College of Arts and Sciences, Black Hills State University, Unit 9059, Spearfish, SD 57799 or davidwolff@bhsu.edu, or 642-6221

IMPORTANT UPCOMING EVENT

Make plans to attend the West River History Conference in Keystone, September 27-29 (Thursday evening through Saturday morning) at the Keystone Community Center. Hear good papers, and visit with good friends about Black Hills History. Call Bob at 666-4630 or Betty Jo at 666-4824