The Plains Indian visited the Black Hills only in the summer time, pausing briefly to cut lodge poles from the stringy pines of the foot hills, or to trap the beaver in the lower courses of the rocky streams, leaving the higher mountains to the lightning, the thunder, and the gods. If he tarried too late into the winter, or near the mighty ridges of Harney Peak, he might see the frantic, flickering ghost dance, that pale blue lightning that sweeps and flitters across the mountains, bearing the spirits of departed warriors once more to earth, to sing again the songs of victory in the halls of the Manitou.

Why would anybody write slush like this? The answer is greed. I am afraid, sheer, unadulterated human greed and lust for money. I know, because I wrote those words myself. If not typical of the promotional literature of the Black Hills, they are nevertheless right in there pitching along with the best (or worst)

*This essay was originally presented in slightly different form at the Black Hills History Conference in Spearfish on 2 May 1980.

of what the boosters had to offer in the way of promotional pyrotechnics.

The Black Hills were a mining area, and a mine has been accurately defined as "a hole in the ground, the owner whereof is a liar." Given this basic premise, it is easy to understand the thought processes that entered into the writing of the prospectus of a mining company, a form of advertising endeavor that for years was to set the general tone of reliability for all Black Hills promotions.

2. Bill Nye, the Laramie (Wyoming) editor and humorist, is credited with the aphorism, which, if not universal in its application, does appear to conform to almost all of the observable facts of the matter.

*Dressed in Sunday best for the camera, owners and boosters pose proudly beside the Spokane Mine near Spearfish.*
The prospectus of a mineral prospect is not, strictly speaking, a branch of business literature, for the accountants, even in the early days, tended to modify and tone down the exuberance of even the most garrulously mendacious promoter. Nor is a prospectus a part of what may be categorized as "advertising" proper, except, of course, in that its aim is to get the reader to part with his money in return for some real or fancied benefit. No, the mining prospectus rightly belongs in the glorious and untrammeled realm of imaginative fiction, and the creative capabilities of the writer of the average mining prospectus would probably have made him a fortune if he had employed them in the field of purely literary endeavor.

All this is not to say that the mining prospectus was composed entirely of falsehoods. Generally, the address where a prospective stockholder was supposed to send his money was given with clarity, and indeed with profusion, in several places throughout the work. Sometimes the location of the mine—usually "right next to the Homestake," meaning as a general thing within the same or a neighboring state—was given with enough precision so that the reader could come and see for himself the crudely salted claims in which he was being urged to sink his money. Beyond these two accuracies—and one of them often a bit dubious—the mining prospectus quickly took off for the high ground of literary creativity. Let us take a look into a few of them.

First to hand is the prospectus of the Cheyenne Gold Mining Company of the Black Hills, written in 1879. The company’s properties were said to be "located in the Great Mineral Belt near Deadwood," which certainly gave the locators lots of leeway in case they wanted to shift around a little. The prospectus begins with a quotation from D. B. Canoll & Company's "Review of the Black Hills Resources," a work that, comparing the Black Hills with California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado, declares that "Dakota beats them all, the BLACK HILLS are one BIG BONANZA.... A TREASURE HOUSE OF PRECIOUS MINERALS that has no equal on earth." Canoll appears to have been an optimist; he was also one of the directors of the Cheyenne Company. The prospectus goes on to mention a 1,000-pound quartz boulder that had just been taken out of the mine—one cannot help wondering how they got it out in one piece—and to tell how $48 in pure gold was in a few minutes scraped from "a small portion of the surface," a showing that encouraged the promoters to expect "a dazzling sight" when the boulder was
cracked open. It is a pity that the owners did not wait until after the boulder was opened to write up their prospectus, but the reader may assume that they probably knew what they were doing.

Mill runs of Cheyenne ores showed gold running about $12 to the ton, presuming always that these runs were made with ore that was truly representative of the ore body as a whole, and assays of judiciously selected bits of ore running as high as $1,162 to the ton were provided by C. C. Davis of Deadwood, who must have been the kind of assayer dear to the heart of every mineral promoter. Milling costs were estimated at only $1.80 to the ton of ore, which anybody could see with half an eye would leave a very considerable profit to be distributed to those canny speculators who had invested in the stock. No further records of the Cheyenne mine exist, but presumably, from its location, it was eventually incorporated into the Homestake Mine.

The Black Hills Placer Mining Company of Rockerville submitted its prospectus to "capitalists and others who desire to take an interest in an exceptionally safe mining operation, confident that it will be recognized at once, by those well informed, as the best that has ever been presented to the public." This was the company that eventually built the enormous flume from Sheridan to Rockerville and provided the writer Ambrose ("Bitter") Bierce with much of the ammunition that would later fuel his literary venom, for he was hired to manage the company but found himself hindered at every step by the incompetence and dishonesty of his employers. The prospectus premised that the flowing water of the flume, if properly employed in hydraulic mining, could wash the gold from 14,400 cubic yards of gravel every day. Prospectors with claims to sell in the area had assured the promoters that their gravels held from $2 to $5 a yard in gold nuggets, and as the cost of operation would be a negligible $200 a day, any fool could plainly see that the company could not help but be a paying proposition. The cost of the flume (dam, ditches, lumber, hose, and nozzles)

3. Cheyenne Gold Mining Company of the Black Hills, Dakota Territory, Prospectus and By-Laws (New York: Mining Record Press, 1879), pp. 6, 8. A copy of this prospectus can be found on microfilm at the South Dakota Historical Resource Center (SDHRC), Pierre.
4. Ibid., pp. 18-19.
5. Black Hills Placer Mining Company (n.p., 1879), p. 1. A copy of this publication can also be found on microfilm at SDHRC.
was estimated at close to $200,000, an amount that the projected operations could have liquidated in ten days, but the promoters, toward the end of the prospectus, toned down their estimates of the gold content of the gravel to a mere 25¢ a yard. A good deal of gold did eventually come out of the company’s Rockerville gravel pockets, but hardly any of it ever found its way into the pockets of the stockholders who originally invested in this grandiose promotion.6

The Wyoming Water Company was even more imaginative. It included among its organizers A. J. Bowie, chief engineer of the famous Father De Smet Mine, but his presence did not appear to convey much wisdom upon them, for they proposed to run a thirty-mile flume from Deadwood to Spearfish Canyon. Any flume that long would have stuck out over the edge of the Black Hills like a fishpole, and this protrusion would have needed the support of an extensive trestle-work where it hung out over the

6. Ibid., pp. 9-11, 13, 18.
The project, needless to say, eventually evaporated, although on paper it was capitalized for five million dollars.

The Deadwood Zinc and Lead Mining Company, in a prospectus issued in the 1890s, planned to operate in Spruce Gulch and claimed that "the company has enough ore blocked out in the mine and ready for treatment to repay every investor far more than the par value of his stock," a siren song that seemed to have considerable attraction for the promoters of every mine, for each of them sang it loud and often. The values alleged to reside in this mammoth mass of ore ran $24.42 to the ton, and after electric smelting, $20 would be left from each ton of ore for distribution to the stockholders at a rate of $1.40 a year for every share, which had originally sold for 75¢ each. It did not pan out that way, and the company repeatedly had to declare "dutch dividends," as assessments on the stockholders were called. George Hearst, the Homestake financier, summed it up, as quoted in the prospectus, when he said "the Homestake is the biggest mine in the Black Hills, and this property is right next to it." Geographically speaking, he may have been right, but financially speaking, he appears to have been dead wrong.

The Scotland Mining Company of Bear Gulch, near Tinton on the Wyoming border, suggested to potential investors in a prospectus issued about 1900 that if the Homestake Mine could make money on gold ore running $3.50 to the ton, the Scotland Company could certainly make money on tin ore that ran $20 to the ton. The problems involved in this kind of calculation are fourfold: the tin deposits might not have been assessed with exactness; the cost of extracting the ore from the ground might be higher than expected; the problems of processing the ore, once raised, might be greater than anticipated; and the value of the tin itself was subject to considerable market variation. It was upon this four-sided rock of mineralogical imprecision that the average mining project almost invariably foundered.

The Gold Eagle Mining Company of Maitland, taking advantage of the cyanide gold-processing boom that swept the

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8. The Deadwood Zinc & Lead Mining Company (n.p. [Deadwood?], ca. 1890s), p. 11.

A copy of this prospectus can be found in the archives of the Adams Museum, Deadwood, South Dakota.
Gold mining and tin mining were both attempted in Bear Gulch. Miners here pan for gold.
northern Hills in the early 1900s, advertised that its mine, using this inexpensive and efficient new method of removing the gold from its ore, had "become the same as any other manufacturing business." A. J. Simmons, the Deadwood mining engineer, testified, in a letter reprinted in the prospectus, that the "mine" (his quotation marks) had large values and unbounded possibilities for future development. He offered his opinion that the Gold Eagle had "the making of a permanent paying mine which will yield handsome profits in long years to come." The status of the operation itself may be best assessed from the illustrations in the prospectus, which were all of other nearby mining operations; the Gold Eagle promoters had not even gone so far as to build a privy on their own property. Making a virtue of this defect, the promoters urged that "the largest profits in any mining enterprise are made by those who become interested at its inception." a truism that somehow seems to ignore a few of the other factors involved in making a truly profitable investment.10

The railroads, too, enthusiastically entered into the promotion of the Black Hills and their mines. In 1903, the Burlington Route's famous illustrated booklet *Mines and Mining in the Black Hills* pointed out that the Hills were producing a million dollars a month in gold and were "supporting two wide-awake cities and dozens of smaller towns and villages," where a few years earlier there had been only wilderness and desolation, a change, the booklet claimed, that had "been brought about through the application of business methods to the mining and milling of gold ore." This commercialization, though it had "largely robbed mining of the elements of romance," had given it the reliability of any other industrial activity.11 The booklet listed all of the minerals found in the Hills and provided detailed descriptions of all mines—both operative and prospective—telling of their locations, facilities, management, and production. All in all, the Burlington produced a most commendable— if overly enthusiastic—brochure, and tens of thousands of copies of it were distributed in the East in the hope of bringing capitalists into the Hills to invest in mines, which would then provide a steady business for the railroad.

11. Burlington Route [Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad], *Mines and Mining in the Black Hills* (n.p., ca. 1903), p. 3. There were several editions of this pamphlet; the edition cited here reads "Thirty-Fifth Thousand" on the title page.
Individual towns, and especially Deadwood, also boomed the mines in their vicinity. In 1904, the Black Hills Mining Men's Association produced a splendid quarto-volume entitled *Black Hills Illustrated*, which dwelt heavily on the many virtues of Deadwood and the mining camps around it. Half of the book was devoted to lengthy descriptions of specific mines, and all of the descriptions were unrestrained and optimistic. In 1917, the Deadwood Business Club, a sort of early-day chamber of commerce, published its booklet *Mines and Mining*. In such a way as to invariably praise, the publication described the mines around the town, saying, for example, of the Alder Creek group, with what is to be hoped was unconscious irony, that it was "one of the properties which needs only brains and capital to make it a paying proposition."\(^2\) That sounds a good bit like an early description of the state of Texas, which, like hell, was said to need only water and good people to make it prosper.

Mining, however, was a variable business and provided the Black Hills with an economic history closely resembling the route of a well-constructed roller coaster. The optimism of the mining promoter, as well as the expertise that he had gained in advertising even the most dubious mines, was soon transferred to promoting the Black Hills as a whole, as Black Hillers strove mightily to bring in new citizens and new businesses and to ensnare their share of the tourist trade that was increasingly coming to the West. The scope of a mineral prospectus is necessarily limited by the restricted nature of its chosen topic; advertising designed to boost either commercial opportunities or tourism has before it the limitless realm of all human endeavor, and the Black Hills advertiser, like the Grecian poet of old, knew no restraints when he struck upon his well-named instrument, the lyre.

In 1881, the Deadwood Board of Trade, the membership of which reads like a roster of the pioneer leaders of the city, published a booklet entitled *The Black Hills of Dakota* in which the writers did not allow their rhetoric to be limited by any unseemly modesty or diffidence. "In no place on God's green earth," they claimed, "is the flora more beautiful or a greater variety found," and this abundant verdure was watered by "crystal streams, fed by numerous springs,... now whirling

The Burlington Route also used postcards to advertise the scenic splendors along its Black Hills route.

around sharp corners or rushing over rapids—rippling on to the foothills, the quiet murmuring suggestive of angel whispers [in the dream of love]." The climate of the earthly paradise that they thus described consisted of "bright sunshine during most of the winter, followed by a few gloomy days in spring," a spring that was, however, "as lovely as that of Italy... while autumn is still more charming." They did admit that "the northern Hills are somewhat colder than Hot Springs," but claimed that "it is not a
As early as 1893, people were coming to marvel at and photograph themselves near the natural wonders of the Black Hills region.
disagreeable cold, and the atmosphere is always bracing, even during the most severe snowstorms.”

In 1889, a little pamphlet entitled *The Black Hills, America’s Land of Minerals* assured the prospective investors that the bandits and ruffians who had originally attended the gold rush of 1876 had long since been replaced by gentle and cultivated citizens. “Time quiets all passions,” they asserted, and although “the hills and mountains are rough, they are also ‘kindly, . . . they are civilized.’ The visitor would find that “law and civilization abound everywhere and the law is respected in a manner that would put many an older community to shame.” The scenic wonders of the Hills themselves—always a favorite topic of the promoters—were claimed to be dramatic enough to leave the observer speechless with awe and wonder and to infuse him with “the feeling that one stands in the presence of sublimity itself.” In the less sublime regions of the Hills, and especially in Deadwood, the visitor would “come face to face with culture and refinement everywhere” and would have to actively “search for rudeness and incivility” in a city so new, so ornate, and so extensive that the visitor might now and then feel it necessary to “pause and think for a moment” to “be certain that the scene is real.” A conveniently provided chart of Deadwood’s business activities, however, might give the visitor still further pause: grocers did an annual business of $640,000, while liquor dealers did a business of $270,000. Such figures might lead the thoughtful man to surmise that he could, if he looked hard for it, now and then locate a modicum of “rudeness and incivility” in a city where so much liquor found a market.

In the same year, a similar publication, *The Southern Districts of the Black Hills*, described the population of the area with an enthusiasm that would have been embarrassing if the pamphlet had been much circulated in the areas it described. The citizens of Rapid City were said to be “men of bold spirit and boundless enterprise, men who have faith in its future, men who never tire,

13. Board of Trade, Deadwood, D.T., *The Black Hills of Dakota, 1881* (Deadwood: Daily Pioneer and Job Office, 1881), pp. 3-4. The quotation about the “angel whispers” is so reminiscent of J. Proctor Knott’s famous oration on Duluth that I have added from the latter words that seem to have been omitted from the former.

and who know no such word as fail," and whose presence made Rapid City a place where there was room and welcome, "help and encouragement for men of brains and energy," but not "an inch of room nor an ounce of welcome for loafers and vagrants." It sounds like an ideal community, and not at all like the Rapid City that was once described to me by an old-timer in Keystone. "Rapid City?" said he, "Why it's just like purgatory: you have to pass through it before you can get up to the Black Hills."

Almost every promotional effort that came out during the first forty years of Black Hills settlement contained suggestions about business opportunities in the various communities. In 1905, Deadwood advertised that it had openings for such diverse enterprises as a flour mill, a woolen mill, a machinery factory, a canning plant, a soap works, a packing house, a broom factory, an oatmeal plant, a wagon and carriage works, and several assorted wholesale houses. Ten years later, however, most of these businesses had either been lured into town, or all hope that they could be procured had been abandoned. A 1915 brochure advertised only the need for a flour mill, a woolen mill, and a motion picture studio. Considering the number of movies that have since been filmed in the Black Hills, this last was probably not such a bad idea.

Hot Springs, at the southern end of the Hills, not only praised its own admittedly salubrious climate but expanded extensively upon the efficacy of its famous mineral waters, which "had proved of wonderful benefit" in "a long and dreadful list of cases" including rheumatism, sciatica, nervous prostration, gastric catarrh, dyspepsia, constipation, asthma, hay fever, tuberculosis, skin diseases of all kinds, neuralgia, paralysis, jaundice, gout, abdominal plethora and adiposity, chronic diarrhoea, and syphilis in all its forms. A case would have to be a stubborn one indeed, the Hot Springs bulletins implied, if it could long resist the healing properties of their mineral waters. Promoters claimed that many sufferers "brought here utterly helpless and full of agony" were "in a week able to walk, and in a month fully

16. I do not recall the name of the old-timer, for I have known a good many of that ilk.
17. Deadwood Trust and Savings Bank, Old Deadwood (n.p., ca. 1905). It is not clear whether the bank was the author-publisher or merely the principal advertiser in this publication. Deadwood Business Club, Souvenir Book of Deadwood, Lawrence County, South Dakota (Deadwood, 1915).
The Carlsbad of America

IN THE FAMOUS
BLACK HILLS

THE LAND OF BLUE SKY

"332" Days of Sunshine per Year

Winter Temperature
The same as at
St. Louis, Mo.

Summer Temperature
Eight Degrees Cooler
Than at
Atlantic City, N. J.

The Famous Plunge
is always attractive, and claims
the attention of most of the
guests for at least a portion of
each day.

Wind Cave
near Hot Springs, is one of the
show-places of the Continent.

Battle Mountain
Echo Canon, The Bad Lands,
The Falls of the Min-ne-kah-ta
and Cascade Springs are easily
reached either on horse-back or
with coaches or on the wheel.

By 1910, Hot Springs promoters were stressing the recreational
aspects of the Hills in their pamphlets and brochures.
restored," passing, at this healthful modern spring of Siloam, from "almost certain death to the full strength of manhood." 18 Indeed, manhood and its manifold problems do seem to figure largely in the health ads of the times, which casts some doubt, in our own more cynical age, upon the true extent of the much-vaulted Victorian primness of those days.

If the sufferer did resist the curative powers inherent in soaking in or imbibing the healing waters of Hot Springs, he could always resort to Doctor King’s New Life Pills, a patent medicine widely available in Deadwood. These pills were described as "sugar-coated globules of health," "the busiest little things that were ever made," a nostrum capable of "changing weakness into strength, listlessness into energy, brain-fag into mental power," and guaranteed to bestow upon the patient "the appetite of a goat" by awakening into activity his previously torpid bowels, kidneys, and liver. 19 A thorough course of treatment with Doctor King’s New Life Pills must have been a memorable experience for all concerned.

For those who arrived at Hot Springs without afflictions, expeditions to Battle Mountain, the Bad Lands, Cascade Springs, Wind or Onyx Cave, and Sylvan Lake were recommended. Hot Springs, having little mining and hardly any industry, was quick to capitalize upon the tourist attractions of the Hills. For the nimble or the recently rejuvenated, therefore, promoters recommended a hike or a horseback ride up to the top of Harney Peak or to the Needles, either of which was considered likely to provide about all the exercise and entertainment that any visitor could reasonably require. 20

These scenic and recreational aspects of the Hills took the lead in Black Hills advertising in the 1920s. The gold mines, caught

18. Deadwood Board of Trade, Deadwood, Metropolis of the Black Hills, South Dakota (Deadwood, April 1892), unpaged. This publication was generous in its advertisement of the benevolent pools and potations of Hot Springs. See also J. W. Jones, Jones’ Guide to the Hot Springs of the Black Hills (Hot Springs, S. Dak.: Minnekahta Herald Print, 1891) and Burlington Route, Hot Springs, S.D.: A Peerless Health Resort in the Heart of the Black Hills (n.p., n.d., but a copy can be found at SDHRC).

19. The advertisement for Doctor King’s pills appeared in the Deadwood Pioneer-Times on 23 March 1899 and at many other times in various forms. The pills must have been available nationwide, but from the frequency of such patent medicine ads in the Deadwood papers, one gets the impression that the area was a fertile field for such nostrums.

20. See, for example, Jones, Jones’ Guide to the Hot Springs, p. 22.
between a fixed price for gold and production costs that had been steadily rising since the First World War, were, except for the Homestake, gradually going out of business. Opportunities for either mining or commercial investment were correspondingly diminishing to the point where even a natural-born promoter could not with a clear conscience devote his talents to their promotion. The scenery and the beauty of the mountains, on the other hand, were still a marketable asset, for, as a 1923 brochure explained, "the mystery and magic with which the red man imbued these mountains still remains, and the gold fever abating has brought their scenic splendors again into prominence." Cool summer nights—a blessing in those days before air conditioning—fishing, scenery, historic sites, and above all rodeos and pageants were soon promoted as Black Hills attractions worthy

21. Black Hills, South Dakota (n.p., ca. 1923), p. 1. Internal information states that this booklet was produced as a joint venture of various Black Hills commercial clubs and the South Dakota Department of Immigration.

President Calvin Coolidge received an Indian name and chief's headdress at a 1927 Deadwood pageant.
Booming the Black Hills

of the long and arduous automobile trip from Minneapolis or Chicago.

A Deadwood pageant produced in 1927 for the reception of President Calvin Coolidge, although short lived, was probably the zenith (or the nadir, depending on your point of view) of this sort of festival. It got off to a good start as a suitably dressed "Miss Deadwood" firmly cried out, "Welcome, welcome, Columbia and her Daughters, Welcome to Deadwood and to this Historical Pageant" to the multitude assembled at the fair grounds. The performance went on to include a representation of the very beginning of time, during which, in the words of the libretto, "ghostlike forms are seen approaching, followed by many beautiful things. They lift their veils, and behold, we see the Dawning of Creation."

Drawing a veil of modesty over this scene, the pageant continued with a Dance in the Wilderness, "a symbolical ballet representing the Spirit of the Wilderness in its most playful mood, with the Powers of the Rivers and the Mist Maidens dancing in the forest in merry play." Similar imaginative and historical episodes followed one after another until, in conclusion, a Grand Masque of the Nations assembled, with "characteristic dances of the many nations given with correct costumes for each." President Coolidge, at some time during the festivities, was inducted into the Sioux Tribe by Chief Chauncey Yellow Robe and given an Indian name, which his Democratic detractors soon translated into "Big Chief Stone-in-the-Face." When the pageant was over, the party continued until the wee hours of the morning with dancing in the reproduction of an early-day Deadwood saloon and gambling hall. This was just the kind of attraction that the tourists of those times would come to the Black Hills to see, and it was not long before almost every town in the Hills had its pageant, its rodeo, or its civic celebration of some kind. Planners annually recruited maidens, trolls, elves, urchins, cowboys, and performers generally to present to the vacationing public some sort of a spectacle that would be both memorable and attractive, and which they could suitably advertise.

Black Hills promotion and publicity had reached its high point. The boosters had learned their trade while advertising the mines,

22. "Days of 76" Historical Pageant of Deadwood, August 5, 1927 (program) and Program, "Days of 76," President Coolidge Day, Thursday, August 4, 1927, both in the Adams Museum.

23. Ibid.
a school of hard experience that both instructed and corrupted them. Simultaneously, they advertised the business and commercial opportunities of the Hills, an endeavor that gave a wider, richer scope to their literary efforts. By the 1920s, when tourism replaced business and mining as the major Black Hills enterprise, the boomers and the boosters had thoroughly learned their business, and they have been busy at it ever since. Oddly, once rotogravure and, later, color printing became easily available, the quality of the promotional writing seems to have become less vivid, the verbal images less exuberant, the praises less fulsome, and the pleasures involved in reading these modern promotional efforts—and I do not plan to single out any one modern example as more flaccid or insipid than the rest—has correspondingly diminished. Those early boosters, who sought to create their colorful images in their readers’ minds, those good old publicists who skillfully dealt with mental images instead of colored pictures, did a better job in many ways than do their successors in our own day. All honor to them, those gaudy old liars! They brought the Black Hills to the attention of all the world, and they brought our ancestors to the Hills. They did not show us pictures, those old time experts who with a word could summon up an image; instead, they told us what there was to see and let us conjure up with the eyes of an informed imagination the many marvels that, artfully described, could lure the settler, the investor, or the tourist to the Hills.
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