In August 1875 gold was discovered in the gulch that would later become the location of the infamous city of Deadwood, South Dakota. The entire Black Hills area was off-limits to whites at that time, having been designated as Sioux land in the Treaty of 1868. Nevertheless, by the following spring, thousands of miners had swarmed into the forbidden land and Deadwood became the center of the 1876 rush. Founded almost simultaneously with the town was the newspaper, the Black Hills Pioneer, which provides a revealing record of that turbulent first year.

Deadwood is one of the few mining boom towns that has survived to the present day. Although the original city was destroyed in the fire of 1879, many buildings dating from the 1890s have survived and are still clinging to the sides of the hills along Whitewood and Deadwood creeks. Some of the Pioneer files from 1876 to 1879 were also lost in that fire. However, enough issues were salvaged from various sources so that a record of the history of that fascinating era could be preserved.

Annie D. Tallent, the first white woman in the Black Hills, who later wrote a history of the area, commented:

The Black Hills Weekly Pioneer was a wide-awake, newsy sheet in 1876, and made its influence felt far and wide. Not only did it contain information of the rich placer and quartz discoveries and other current news of the great mining camp, but also discussions of many of the important public questions of the day, especially those directly affecting the people of the Black Hills.

The United States government, was roundly abused for its seeming
dereliction in duty to the outlawed people of the Black Hills; the territorial question, the question of county organization,—in which the head of the territorial government of the Dakotas was handled without gloves, for not doing what he really had no power to do, received special consideration. The people of the Black Hills believed in full and unrestrained liberty of the press in 1876.¹

A quotation from the SALUTATORY of the first issue of the Black Hills Pioneer printed as a half-sheet on Thursday, 8 June 1876, reveals the conditions under which the first successful paper in the Black Hills began.

To all who see this paper, we wish to say that it is published under many difficulties, and that it is not what we intend to make it. It is an enterprise that has not a parallel in the United States, and still we hope to overcome all the untoward circumstances that surround us. Our material to print this paper was transported in the depth of winter, almost 400 miles, and brought through and into a hostile Indian country. As other enterprising men have done, we came here not to try the gulches or leads for gold, but to give those who have this work in hand the very latest news. We shall do everything in our power to bring the country of the Black Hills into civilization and to replace the nomads of the plains by a people of enterprise and determination.

The printing was done in a half-finished log cabin that gave scant protection from the elements. Subsequent issues of the paper were published on Saturdays and the word was spelled “Saturday” in the dateline for several months. Apparently, no one had time to notice the error.

The story of the Pioneer began even before the first issue was printed in Deadwood. In the winter of 1875, W. A. Laughlin and A. W. Merrick purchased a printing outfit in Denver and had it transported to the Black Hills. The original destination was Custer, the first mining camp of the region. However, the press arrived in May, just as the populace of Custer was abandoning that town to head for more promising diggings to the north in the place called Deadwood. Merrick and Laughlin managed to put out one issue of the paper in Custer, a small half-sheet, which they called the Black Hills Weekly Pioneer. Then, they too decided to move their operation to Deadwood, but they were “out of funds and stranded.” Fortunately, they met Captain C. V. Gardner, “a

¹ Annie D. Tallent, The Black Hills: Or, The Last Hunting Ground of the Dakotas (1899; reprint ed., Sioux Falls: Brevet Press, 1974), p. 200. Most of the issues from that first year, when the Pioneer was published as a weekly, can be read on microfilm at the Deadwood Public Library, although many of the issues are quite faded. Several bound issues of later years are also available at the library to serious students of history. Because the writing style of the Pioneer is so colorful, I will use direct quotations from the newspapers themselves to tell most of the story of Deadwood.
fellow printer and leader of men,” who had been in the newspaper game in Iowa prior to his arrival in Custer on 14 May 1876.

He [Gardner] found Merrick and Laughlin and was informed that they were stranded and anxious to go with the crowd to the new gold fields. Laughlin was suffering from tuberculosis and was lying on a blanket spread over pine boughs. Gardner was informed that they needed two hundred and five dollars to reach the new camp. He said to them, “Will you go to Deadwood, if I will guarantee the payment of that amount on the arrival of the outfit?” the afflicted man, raising up from his pine bough couch, said between coughs, “We surely will.”

Captain Gardner went on his way, and true to his promise, when he arrived in Deadwood, prepared and circulated a petition asking for funds to bring the newspaper to camp, heading the list himself... The balance of the money necessary... was paid by Gardner himself when it arrived... Mr. Laughlin was quite sick and asked Captain Gardner to purchase his interest in the paper, which he did and wrote some of the items that went into the first issue.

Conditions at the Pioneer office were still hectic on 29 August when the paper acquired its first reporter. According to Captain Gardner’s account: “One hot evening... I was busy turning off copy... One of my two compositors was off on a ‘jamboree’ and my partner was out bucking the only weakness he had, ‘Faro.’ I was wondering how I ever could get the paper out on time, when in came a young man... saying: ‘My name is Dick Hughes. Do you want a compositor?’ ”

Hughes was hired on the spot and was later described by Gardner as “the most finished writer that ever wrote a paragraph for a Black Hills paper.” However, according to Hughes’ own account of the meeting, he went to work for the Pioneer, not from love of reporting, but to sustain himself and his partners in their prospecting ventures. Hughes was never very successful as a gold miner, so he continued in journalism, eventually becoming an editor of the Rapid City Journal. He described Gardner as “a veteran of the Civil War, a pioneer by nature, and an optimist who never for a moment allowed himself to doubt that a great future was in store for his beloved Black Hills.”

Gardner held his interest in the paper for six months and then sold out to Merrick who handled the paper alone until about 1878.

“Also connected with the Pioneer were George Stokes, Dr. C. W. Meyer, and Jack Langrishe; versatile and interesting writers.

3. Ibid., p. 486.
4. Ibid., p. 487.
Meyer could do justice to a description of a fancy dress ball or a mill in the 'bad lands.' "Hughes claimed that there was a concentration of newspaper talent in Deadwood and because of the intense rivalry, many editorials written and published in Deadwood would have attracted attention in the most metropolitan of publications.

According to Tallent, despite the hardships under which the paper was established, "the venture at once proved a great financial success,—a veritable bonanza. The paper was in great demand, thousands of copies being sold every week at twenty-five cents each, many of which found their way to the outer newspaper world, where excerpts from its columns were freely copied." There were a dozen customers lined up waiting for the first paper as it came off the press, Hughes recalled, and often Merrick and Joe Kubier, the pressman, were kept busy until midnight selling the papers and weighing in the gold dust in which they were paid.

In spite of the success of the paper, there seemed to be a large turnover of owners, for as Tallent reported, "The management of the Pioneer during its twenty years of existence as a daily paper changed financially, editorially or otherwise, as many as fifteen times." On 14 October 1876 when Gardner announced that he was selling his interest in the paper to Merrick, Merrick called for increased support of the paper by advertisers if it were to survive.

One of the difficulties in operating a paper in an isolated community was communication with the outside world. During the early months, there was no telegraph line to Deadwood, so news from the "States" was simply copied from newspapers brought into the Hills. These papers were often weeks or even months old. To offset these problems, the editor tried to promote the extension of the telegraph line to Deadwood. The need for a telegraph was first mentioned in mid-September. The editor used the impending isolation of winter to rally subscriptions for a proposed telegraph line. According to the paper, if the citizens would pledge themselves to buy $5,000 worth of script, not to be paid

6. Hughes, Pioneer Years in the Black Hills, p. 175. "Bad lands" is a Deadwood euphemism for the disreputable part of town.
7. Tallent, The Black Hills, pp. 199-200. Terms were: One year, $5; six months, $3; three months, $2; single copies, 25 cents.
8. Ibid., p. 201.
9. The editor was probably Gardner; editorials were never signed.
The business district in the town of Deadwood. The roofless building at the right was apparently where the first Black Hills Pioneer newspaper was printed.

until the wires were actually in service, then the line might be completed before winter. Apparently, the response was disappointing because on 15 October a lengthy editorial suggested that businessmen raise money to pay for the daily telegraphic reports of the Associated Press to be placed upon bulletin boards on the days that intervened between the publication of the newspaper. The citizens still failed to rally because the next week the comment, “A few stingy people may prevent the whole community from profiting by the telegraph lines,” was followed by an editorial on the same subject.

During the first few weeks of 1877, “Latest by Telegraph” or “Telegraphic News” began to appear rather infrequently and, on 3 February 1877, nearly one column was devoted to complaining about the risks, trouble, and expense of producing a paper in Deadwood. The telegraphic charges were up to seventy-five dollars a month and increased support from the public was needed. Although the telegraph was obviously a financial burden, the editors were able to improve the quality of the paper by substituting more “hard” news in place of the anecdotal items of the past.

Because the editors of the Pioneer were basically promoters engaged in “ballyhooing the Black Hills,” this hard news advertised the advantages of living in the Hills. Themes such as the following were to be reiterated at length in almost every issue.

(Communication)
WHAT WE WANT

That there is gold here in large paying quantities is being verified daily. To the Black Hiller there is a question that more nearly concerns

10. I use the term “editorial” to designate editorial content. Editorials were never labeled as such and news stories often ended as editorials.
him.... Is he to be always in dread of the murderous red man?.... Is the red man to have this country, and are we to get down and out? Let this be settled and all is settled. There is but one policy that will forever put the matter at rest, and that is the same old one that ever gave the white man a foot of ground on the continent.

Let us educate him! What a grand idea.... Its source is purely eastern, and was conceived by a brain that is a facsimile of an ancient fossil. Nothing could be more absurd.... Think of a classic red man skinning a white man alive. Better by far teach the hyena to leave off his midnight visits to the country graveyard, or the subtle serpent to withhold the poison fang. Give us an administration that will extend a helping hand; one that will protect her citizens....

Let us return to the primitive rock before the people of this country shall have forgotten that government means protection.

Let the noble white man have this country that is rich in silver and gold, a delightful climate, and whose valleys are covered with luxuriant grass, and beautiful beyond description.

The Pioneer was obviously not being produced solely for local readers. A regular item in the paper was, “You haven’t time to write? Then send a copy of the Pioneer back each week, and that will do until you get time.” ‘From 150,000 to 200,000 stereotyped fac simile editions of each issue of The Pioneer is published in Chicago... and offered for sale on the railroads and by newsdealers.... We have sold the copyright for three months to some enterprising speculators.”

Hughes stated that copies of the paper were in great demand at twenty-five cents each and that the purchasers often paid another twenty-five cents to have a copy carried out of the Hills to the nearest point reached by United States mail service. Because there was no regular mail service to the Hills, mail was brought in by whatever freight outfit or traveler would carry it for twenty-five cents a piece. The paper served an important function by printing the names of persons with mail to be claimed. On 24 June the “List of Letters Remaining in Office at Sleppy’s Saloon, Lower Deadwood” numbered over three hundred.

The Pioneer editors were not the only ones taking advantage of the interest in the Black Hills. “Mr. D. S. Mitchell, the accomplished view artist, is now taking some excellent views of the prominent scenery in the Hills. His view of Dead Wood [sic] is really fine, and will be a choice thing to send home to friends East.” At times the task of ballyhooing the Black Hills became burdensome. An item called “Besieged” on 24 June complained about the amount of mail with questions about the Hills

11. The Black Hills Pioneer, 8 June 1876.
12. Ibid., 8 July 1876.
13. Ibid., 24 June 1876.
the paper received—most with insufficient or no postage enclosed for a reply. "Hereafter," the editors announced, "no letters will be noticed unless the writer encloses at least fifty cents." Such comments were repeated in several issues.

The general tone of the Pioneer, however, was almost always positive. On the same date, nearly an entire column was devoted to "the Deadwood Country." The article recounted the brief history of the town and remarked on the progress of the city, which only three months before was "occupied by only a few hardy miners,... who had placed their lives in peril, both from Indians and starvation, living on 'meat straight' without even salt, for months." The account continued:

Six weeks ago, the site of Deadwood City was a heavy forest of pine timber; now it extends nearly a mile ... and contains nearly two thousand of the most energetic, driving people on the continent. Every branch of business is represented, and many of them are overdone. Houses are going up on every hand—immense trains [oxen] are constantly arriving loaded with goods of all kinds.

Let the Government but protect these people and ... within two years the Black Hills will contain more than 200,000 of prosperous and happy souls.

The Black Hills are a success... in spite of rival mining districts, "croakers," "tender-feet," and barbarous Indians.

This article was followed by what might be called a "gold miners inspirational," entitled "What It Requires," which cites two rags-to-riches stories and advises that "one essential element of success ... pluck, sand, perseverance, determination to win or die in the effort... stick-too-a-tiveness," tenacious "hang-on-ability" would see through the miner who had become discouraged with seeking for the hour when "'Dame Fortune' would open her cornucopia and rain down upon him showers of gold."

On the other hand, the need for governmental organization commanded only a couple of inches squeezed in among the filler items. "We have seen a code of laws, very extensively signed by the citizens and miners of this vicinity, and calling for a mass meeting for the ratification, change or rejection.... A community as large as this should certainly have some organization, and be governed by a common sense code of laws." 14

Because the Deadwood residents were concerned about their legal status, the headline on 24 June, "THE BLACK HILLERS—They are in the Sioux Reservation Wrongfully, but will be Protected," was good news. The article quoted a telegram sent by General W. T. Sherman in Washington, D.C., to General Phil Sheridan in Chicago with the news that the president said:

14. Ibid., 8 June 1876.
The people who had gone to the Black Hills of Dakota, inside of the Sioux reservation... are there wrongfully, and they should be notified of that fact, but the government is engaged in certain measures, that will probably result in opening up the country to occupation and settlement. Meanwhile, the Indians should not be allowed to scalp and kill anybody, and you are authorized to afford protection.

This did not end the trespassers’ quarrel with the federal government, however. On 8 July the seemingly innocuous question, “Who was the first discoverer of gold in the Black Hills?” appeared in the paper. “Uncle Samuel” was the answer given, referring to the government-sponsored Custer expedition of 1874. “Indian treaty stipulations could not restrain him... and he [Uncle Sam] should not now call citizens ‘violators of the law’ for following the trails he, with commendable public spirit ‘blazed’ out for them.” The next item asked “how Uncle Sam can assert that we are here... ‘in violation of the law,’ while he... has a Collector in Deadwood City collecting Federal taxes?”

Obviously, the residents of Deadwood were tired of their “common-law wife status” and yearned to be made honest citizens because on 29 July yet another editorial called for an act of Congress to legally open the Hills, so that “we may be accepted as citizens and not... as outlaws and trespassers.” On the same day another article, beginning as a news item, but ending as an editorial, told of a petition being circulated among the citizens requesting that Lawrence County be organized according to the laws of Dakota. On 5 August, another plea for a city government reminded the residents that the entire length of Main Street was solidly filled with log and frame buildings and fire protection was sorely needed. The magnitude of this problem was revealed on 9 September. “The actual value of the improved property in this county at the present time falls but little if any short of one million dollars.”

Finally, on 16 September came the announcement that a provisional government had been established with 1,130 votes cast; 1,082 for organization and 57 against. A little over a month later, on 28 October, nearly the entire front page was used to report that, in anticipation of the ratification of the peace treaty with the Indians, Deadwood was at last officially organized. A complete listing of city ordinances included the posting of a license tax. Milliners and boarding houses were assessed $5 per quarter; liquor dealers and Chinese laundries, $10; dance houses, $20; with bankers and express drivers hardest hit at $25 a quarter. The second page of this issue was devoted to articles about preparations for the elections of officials, the progress of the region and the
need for outside capital investments to equip the mines with the sophisticated machinery needed to mine the ore profitably, and editorials calling for the organization of a public school and fire station.

One of the livelier of these public interest messages was printed on 21 October. Entitled "Careless People," it stated three reasons for discouraging the thoughtless discharge of firearms upon the city streets. First, "it is placing the lives of our people in jeopardy." Second, residents would get so accustomed to the sound of gunshots they might go unwarned in case of an actual attack by Indians, and third, the money wasted on cartridges could better be used for civil and charitable causes. An editorial entitled "Will Congress Recognize Us?" on 2 December indicated that the matter still had not been settled, but apparently by 3 February, occupation of the Hills had been legalized according to a report from Dr. Meyers at the legislature in Yankton.15

However, ballyhooing the Black Hills included more than calls for establishment of government. The prosperity of the area was also lauded. Thus late in June, columns with such titles as "A Few Hours Among the Miners—What They are Doing, and What They Say" became a feature of most issues. Mining news was important and reported in length. In addition, there were such items as a reprint from the Howard, Nebraska, paper about L. J. Keeney who had returned from the Black Hills "bringing with him gold dust to the value of $440, as proof of the fact that the 'Hills' is a gold producing country."16

Sometimes promoting the Hills involved publishing discouraging reports of the economy and "diggings" in other areas. On 22 July "Our View of the General Depression" reported that partisans were attempting to blame each other for the depression that was caused by the Civil War. The editors suggested a lowering of the ten-hour workday, so that available work could be spread among the unemployed, and suggested "the immediate relief is in encouraging emigration to the . . . West." The 28 October issue carried the first article about the numerous stampedes, which on several occasions sent Deadwood miners scurrying

15. Another legislative report concerned a little-known fact of Black Hills history—the move to recognize the Black Hills as a separate territory. The idea met opposition from eastern Dakota interests and eventually failed, but not before Dr. Meyers introduced a bill to have the Black Hills set apart as the territory of Lincoln and a mass meeting was called in Deadwood to consider the proposal (Ibid., 31 Mar. 1877).

16. Ibid., 24 June 1876.
Gold miner on Two Bit Creek near Deadwood panning two pails of dirt in a sluice box.
after rumors of richer diggings elsewhere. It was apparently not the policy of the editors to encourage such migrations, for on 13 January they printed "The Muse of a Miner," which chided the miners who left Deadwood with the sad tale of "Bedrock Bill." The prose culminated in verse from the pen of Jack Langrishe.

The editors seemed to be myopic and regional in their views, as evidenced by the article "What Wyoming and Dakota Both Ought to Do," which proposed that those legislatures appropriate money to dig wells along the routes to the Hills for the convenience of the travelers. On 30 September the editors took advantage of rivalry between the towns attempting to profit from the Hills trade with "Cheyenne, Wake Up." The article called for that city to build a shorter route to the Hills and was followed by an announcement from the Sidney Telegraph that Sidney, rather than Cheyenne, would henceforth have the United States mail contract. "Minnesota on the Alert" on 16 December reported that Saint Paul was one of the eastern cities that had recognized the importance of the Black Hills trade and was considering steps to establish a more direct and safe means of business with Deadwood.

This regionalism reached a height in a series of articles quarreling with the governor of Dakota Territory. Apparently, Governor J. L. Pennington delayed in answering a citizens' petition to organize a constitutional government in the Hills. On 21 October under "Interesting Correspondence," the governor gave his explanation for the delay, claiming that he had answered every petition and blaming the failure of his answers to arrive on the mail service. He went on to chastize the Pioneer editors for their criticism.

I can not think that you intentionally do me... an injustice, and yet I am surprised that a gentlemen of your intelligence should try to impress the people of the Black Hills that I have the authority to appoint county commissioners, or take any other steps to set up civil government... while the treaty of 1868-9 is in force. It has not been for want of sympathy that I have not acted, but... want of authority.

At this point, the correspondence was simply a matter of setting the record straight because the peace treaty had been signed in September and as soon as Congress ratified it, the Hills would be officially open to immigration.

As intent as they were on promoting the Hills, the editors occasionally let some items slip through that indicated that all was not perfect. On 22 July it was reported that although wild flowers and raspberries were still in abundance, "elk meat and venison, 17. Ibid., 19 Aug. 1876.
so plentiful in the Hills a few months ago, are becoming very scarce.” A nostalgic poem on 9 September revealed the homesickness that many of the miners must have experienced. A less prosaic item castigated those who gave in to homesickness and left town without paying their debts. On 19 August “PROGRESS” berated those who were so “chickenhearted” as to turn back in their journey to the Hills.

For at least the first year of Deadwood’s history, the single most newsworthy story consistently was “The Indian Problem.” A few articles showed some understanding of the complexity of the problem, but most of the writing was emotional and vindictive to the point that it may offend the modern reader.

When a cart was driven into [Denver]... with the naked bodies of the victims of these Indians, where men were stripped naked, their private parts severed from their bodies and placed in their mouths, a horrid spectacle... it would be well if these champions of the red men of the forest, as they poetically term them, could place themselves for a few months in the place of the frontiersmen... let them... endeavor to make a living for themselves and their families, and of a sudden... have a band of maurauding savages come upon them in the night-time, applying the torch to the cabin, take out the wife, ravishing her in their sight, then destroying her and her children.

Some pap-sucking Quaker representative of an Indian doxology-mill, wrote in Harper for April, about settling the Indian troubles by establishing more Sunday Schools and Missions among them.

It is enough to make the Western man sick... You might as well try to raise a turkey from a snake egg, as to raise a good citizen from a papoose. Indians can be made good only in one way, and that is to make angels of them.18

In the 1 July 1876 issue, Crook was reported to have had a “brisk little fight with 100 savages” and a short item on the navigation of the Yellowstone River as steamers carried supplies to Terry’s command foreshadows the massacre of Custer and his men. Throughout June and July, troubles with the Sioux can be seen building toward that climatic battle, which took place on 25 June although the news did not reach Deadwood until nearly a month later, probably 20 July.

The scene presented along the main street of Deadwood... was one not soon to be forgotten. The excited, swaying, jostling masses, surging to and fro on both sides of the long, narrow street; the eager groups of men gathered at the doors of numerous business houses in excited discussion of the terrible disaster, gave evidence of how deeply and universally the people of the Hills of all classes were touched by the unexpected calamity. Even the gambling resorts... were silent.19

18. Ibid., 8 June 1876.
19. Tallent. The Black Hills, p. 164. A “voluminous extra” was printed on the evening of the day the news was brought to Deadwood by stage and pony express. Unfortunately, according to Mrs. Elmer Pontius, the Deadwood librarian, no copies of this extra are in existence.
A Mining Party Arrived at Yankton
With $20,000 in Gold Dust

..."I

...ia-*: f

Black Hills Postal Route Established

The Necessities of the Hour

A Demand For Territorial Organization

A Few Hours Among the Miners

What They are Doing, and What They Say

Assassination of Wild Bill
The paper of 22 July devoted much of the first page to a “Full Account of the Battle Between Crook and the Sioux—a Graphic Description” while several stories relating to the Custer massacre occupy back pages. The attitude of the miners toward the massacre is exemplified by an editorial stating, “the hostile Sioux should be exterminated, and white men engaged in trading ammunition to them should be hung.... Let the Government call out a Black Hills brigade and put it into the fields.” This was the first of several calls for some sort of local militia to defend the hills, but there is no evidence that such an organization was ever initiated.

The Custer battle remained in the news for some time, and on 5 August an entire column was devoted to a biography of Custer. The tributes to Custer included an epic poem, “Custer's Death” by Captain Jack Crawford, written in the form of a letter to Buffalo Bill. A few lines from it seem to summarize the prevailing attitude toward Custer's death.

And some day these Quakers will answer
Before the great Judge of us all,
For the death of the daring young Custer
And the boys who around him did fall

The preoccupation with Indians was not paranoia. Indian raids on livestock were almost daily occurrences in Spearfish and Crook City. Deadwood was never attacked, but anyone who dared to venture very far from town was in danger, as evidenced by the report on 26 August of a man who had brought considerable livestock to market “and we hope he will be well repaid for his enterprise as it is a risky business at the present time to drive stock of any kind into the Hills. If game of all kinds could be found close at hand, the chances are that he who endeavored to secure even a rabbit would pay for his rashness with his life.” This comment was followed by an editorial calling for increased vigilance.

“Every thinking, sensible man must confess there is some danger from Indians even in Deadwood. There are other points in connection with this matter which it might not be well to publish, but with which all will become familiar through private sources.” Apparently, the editor did not wish the Indian threat to prevent immigrants or capital from venturing into the Hills, but he felt a responsibility to keep citizens informed.

One outrageous editorial, entitled “CIVILIZED,” especially expresses the feelings of the times.

A repetition of what occurred in our city some weeks ago was enacted during the past week. It was the decapitation of a Sioux Indian some hours after his death. In the first instance we could not complain much
owing to the fact that the deed was done by one supposed to be only in a slight degree nearer civilized than he whose head he carried dangling at his saddle side. [He was a Mexican.] In the last case it was entirely different, inasmuch as the party who brought the head into town was a man—a subject of the United States ... who is supposed to act ... in a half-civilized manner. ... Let all upright citizens take the matter into consideration, and when an Indian is killed leave his remains to rot where they lie or to be devoured by beasts of the woods or fowls of the air. Kill all the Indians that can be killed. ... But when once killed, leave the body intact. ... Until this be done, we may expect the censure of all civilized people.20

Deadwood residents must have been relieved on 16 September to learn that General Crook's weary and hungry troops, while riding ahead to get supplies at Deadwood, had succeeded in pillaging an Indian village in the Battle of Slim Buttes, forty miles to the Northwest. This was one of the last battles of the Indian campaign. Crook and his officers were received by the mayor and city council on 15 September and entertained at the Grand Central Hotel. From the balcony Crook spoke about the campaign and was cheered by the crowd. The party then retired to Langrishe's theatre, which was quickly filled to overflowing with citizens anxious to shake the general's hand and present a petition for a military outpost near Deadwood. In the same issue, the editor lamented the fact that after being so royally entertained, Crook's troops had moved on, leaving the city without an organized defense when bands of as many as one hundred Sioux had been seen within a few miles of Deadwood. On 14 October letters from General Crook explained that the petition had been refused because General Sheridan determined that a winter campaign against "the treacherous Sioux" was necessary.

On 9 September a reprint from the Chicago Times reported, "The ... new Indian commission spent a part of yesterday in buying presents for the redskins." The Pioneer editorialized at length, calling such peace missions a farce. The next item reported four citizens of Rapid City killed by Indians. On 2 September an important speech by J. P. Kidder named the commissioners appointed to negotiate with the Sioux and on 30 September an important story appeared, datelined Red Cloud Agency, 9/20/76, "THE TREATY-The Indians Sign It Under Protest—The Presence of Soldiers on the Reservation an Insult to Them." Although Indian-white relations were to remain turbulent for some time, peace was official.

Not all of the danger in Deadwood was caused by the Indians. The first issue of the Pioneer reported that William Merritt of

Ruby Gulch “received a serious and dangerous wound at the hands of his brother, who was carelessly handling a pistol.” The story concluded with an editorial note:

We hope this will be the last accident of the kind we will be called upon to chronicle. The careless use of firearms is often attended with the most deplorable results, and this brother who has so narrowly escaped the horrible crime of fratricide needs no lecture from us, but some of those heedless campers in the upper part of town, who are almost continually firing their guns, should consider before exploding another cartridge that a ball sped by accident kills as surely as though prompted by malice.

Of course, this was not the last time the Pioneer would chronicle a case of “lead poisoning.” Although shootings were probably not the daily occurrence in Deadwood that western movies portray, there were numerous violent deaths that first year. The first homicide in the hills was the “cool premeditated murder” of John Hinch by John R. Carty and Jerry McCarty over a gambling quarrel. It was reported in some detail, without the terms “alleged” or “accused murderer” of modern crime reporting. When Carty was later found guilty only of assault and battery, the editor wrote the caustic comment, tucked in the local items, “SHOULD it ever be our misfortune to kill a man, which pray God it may not, we would simply ask that our trial might take place in some of the mining camps of these hills.”

Since it was illegal for any white men to be in the Black Hills, everyone there was technically a law breaker, and during that first summer there were no sheriffs, judges, or other upholders of the law. However, the first citizens of Deadwood did feel a need to establish a legal system to ensure protection of property rights. Thus, in one respect, miners were very keen on law—the law that protected a man’s rightful claim. Informal, quasi-legal miners’ courts soon sprang up in most camps. Since there was no jail and no sheriff to take law breakers to the penitentiary, there really was not much a miners’ court could do except hang the accused or set him free. Although there was at least one lynching in the Black Hills, in Deadwood the miners seemed to prefer to set the man free—with the provision that he get out of the Hills.

The most notorious example of such a miners’ jury was in the case of the trial of Jack McCall who was found innocent of the murder of Wild Bill Hickok. Although the initial reporting of Hickok’s murder on 5 August did not foresee the legendary nature of the event, some historians have found a motive for the apparently senseless killing in the comment, “Probably Hickok was the only man we have yet had in our midst who had the
courage and other qualifications to bring some semblance of order to the lawless element of our camp.

Jack McCall continued to make news for several months. On 9 September it was reported that he had been arrested again in Laramie and was being held for trial. McCall turned state’s evidence and accused a W. B. Varnes of paying him to assassinate Hickok because of an argument over a game of poker in Denver. A posse was reported looking for Varnes, who had left on the "new stampede," but no further reports are evident. On 20 January a reprint from the Dakota Herald reported that McCall said he was drunk at the time and had no recollection of the crime, and that he had assumed the name McCall to prevent his parents from knowing his whereabouts. Wild Bill’s killer took the answer to the question of his name along with the reason, if any, for his crime to his grave when he was executed on 1 March.

Crime became a more serious problem as the city grew. Perhaps the lawless element waited until the hardy pioneers mined the gold before arriving with their devious schemes to relieve the miners of their riches. Macon, a flour merchant from Cheyenne, complained on 26 August 1876 that he was cheated by a man he met on the stage and claimed he had deposited his funds in the Cheyenne bank to avoid highwaymen and Indians. He gave Mason a check for $1,200 for the same amount of gold dust. Upon returning to Cheyenne, Mason found that the check was no good. On 7 October an article entitled "The Grandmother’s Trick" told of stage passengers being tricked by a card shark and on 3 February another luckless traveler, Louis Violin, was reported robbed of $700. Finding gold had once been the main problem; now the problem was keeping it. Robberies or swindles upon travelers were reported with some frequency. The robbery of the Deadwood Stage and murder of its popular young driver, John

James Butler (Wild Bill) Hickok was killed by Jack McCall on 2 August 1876. Wild Bill was playing poker at the time and the hand he was holding, a pair of aces and a pair of eights, is now called deadman's hand.
Empty bottles in the back of one of the saloons in Deadwood. It had apparently been a long, hard winter.

Slaughter, was reported at length on 30 March and was to be remembered as the most infamous and tragic of these robberies. One of the more amusing reports of a death was printed on 5 August 1877 under the headline “Found Dead.” The reporter had investigated the rumor that a man had been found dead in South Deadwood. The facts were “too true” for “under the drooping boughs” of spreading trees were the remains of William Cowan, who left a wife and two children “to mourn his untimely death.” He was characterized as having a warm heart and “sterling qualities, being one of those who are enemies to themselves, and died the victim of strong drink.” Tragedy was more starkly portrayed in the story of “A Boy’s Suicide,” the strange and sad tale of Willie Hafner, a fourteen-year-old who was found hanged in the hay-shed behind the California House, his parents’ hotel.24

Not all deaths in early Deadwood were from violence, however. Infectious diseases also took their toll. The news, “small-pox has broken out in town, several persons now having the disease, and cases being reported every day. The physicians say that it is a mild and not confluent form, yet as contagious as though of the confluent form,” was followed by the recommendation that a

22. Ibid., 11 Nov. 1876.
23. Ibid., 3 Mar. 1877.
24. Ibid., 23 Dec. 1876.
suitable building be set aside and nurses be engaged. It was apparently difficult to arouse much enthusiasm for the "pest house" project or for sanitation in general. On 21 October the editor condemned those who "throw the offal and garbage from their kitchens at their very doors." The practice was not likely to cause serious effects in cold weather, he stated, "but disease and death" could result in the spring. An early photograph of Deadwood shows a veritable mountain of bottles growing in the alley behind the saloons.

Besides promoting public service projects, another important function of the paper was to print the various legal notices, which aided the miners in keeping their claims and rights current. On 15 July the Mining Laws of the Ida Gray Quartz district were published. These laws were enacted by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Dakota; however, there were no real law officers to enforce them. By 25 November the status of the miners had been regularized and the entire front page featured the United States Mining Laws and Regulations. The same issue recommended that prospectors advertise their claims "so as to avoid long and tedious litigation." The new mining laws were important enough to be reprinted on 9 and 12 December.

Other "mining news" was probably aimed as much at publicizing the wealth of the region to the outside world as keeping the citizens of Deadwood informed. On 1 July it was reported that claim No. 6 below discovery grossed $2,300 worth of gold in one day—the greatest day's yield to date. On 9 September the mining news referred to the growing importance of Lead City and on 12 December the Homestake Mine was first mentioned. By 14 October claim No. 4 above discovery was grossing over $1,000 a day. The Hidden Treasure Mine had sold for $25,000. Gardner revealed that Gardner and Company had bought a quarter interest in it in July for only $600. The following week "Local News" contained several more items indicating a continued prosperity in the mines.

Most of the national news reported in the Pioneer seems today to have been of small consequence. This is especially true in the early months—before the installation of the telegraph. News items from 24 June include: "President Grant is 54 years old today," "The Americans are said to be behind all other exhibitors at the Centennial," and "The grasshoppers are not doing much damage in Colorado and Nebraska this year." On 1 July a visitor

25. Ibid., 12 Aug. 1876.
from Cheyenne reported that Governor Rutherford Hayes of Ohio had received the Republican nomination for president. On 29 July a reprint from the Philadelphia Press told about Professor Shroeder who was building an airship in which he planned to cross the Atlantic and photograph the bottom of the sea. On 20 January a long story marked the death of Commodore Vanderbilt, and on 10 March the inauguration of President Hayes was reported. The invention by Professor A. Graham Bell of Boston University of the telephone was reported on 24 March and the "Telegraphic News" of 6 April rumored a scandal involving Boss Tweed of New York.26

Outside news items tended to diminish somewhat during that first cold winter, but on 2 December an important event was reported, "An Eventful Night—Celebrating the Arrival of the Telegraph." Deadwood residents had expressed their joy over the completion of the link to the outside world the previous night by lighting a large bonfire in front of the telegraph office and firing thirty-nine salutes from anvils. A grand ball was held at the Grand Central Hotel “attended by the elite of the city.” “Some of the toilets displayed by the ladies present were elegant.” A description followed, but unfortunately the surviving copy of what was probably the first “social news” is too faded to read.

Apparently, except for the expense, the Deadwood telegraph line was a success, unlike the pony express, which was first mentioned on 26 August. It had brought “two mails this week.” However, on 23 September a letter to the editor complained that Seymour and Utter’s pony express was not living up to its pledge to deliver the mail promptly. The deliveries, which had first been made in five or six days by horseback, were now taking two weeks when loaded upon slow-moving ox trains. To add insult to injury, the miners were still paying twenty-five cents per letter. On 7 October “A Burning Shame” berated the pony express company for not living up to its “manifesto.” It seems the original owners had sold the authorization to carry mail to a Mr. Clippinger at Fort Laramie. Instead of maintaining a fleet of pony relays and “intrepid riders,” Clippinger had been placing the mails on the ox trains. Finally, the inauguration of regular stagecoach service apparently solved the mail problem.

The first coach to arrive in Deadwood from Cheyenne made the

26. "Telegraphic News" was used prior to the time the telegraph actually reached Deadwood. It was probably the editors' way of headlining news that they considered important.
trip in six and one-half days, arriving about 25 September 1876. Passengers from California seemed to dominate the passenger list, which was from that time a regular feature of the paper. Indian problems had delayed the building of the stage road, but once it was through, despite problems with bandits, stage service improved rapidly. By 14 October the trip took only four and one-half days from Cheyenne and by March, there was daily service from Cheyenne. Another stage was available once a week from Sidney by 16 December 1876. On 23 December an important notice announced that the Cheyenne and Black Hills Stage Line would transport gold and other valuables “at the company’s risk.”

The growth of Deadwood can also be studied through the first year’s advertisements. With almost each issue, the number and variety of the ads proliferated. The first paper contained only two columns of ads, which included: the Montana Bakery, an announcement that T. E. Harvey, Attorney at Law in Custer City, would be in Deadwood in one month, the Pioneer Drug Store, Pioneer Tin Shop, and City Meat Market. The Iowa Restaurant, L.X.C. Restaurant (open day and night), and the Oro Fino Saloons all advertised “a fine assortment of Wines, Liquors and Cigars.” These ads seem a bit incongruous since the establishments at that time probably consisted of a barrel of whiskey set across two boards in a tent or a hastily-built frame building.

By 24 June the paper had already expanded to four pages with

more advertising, including one two-column ad for "Gardner and Co., Commission Merchants." Since Captain Gardner was connected with the paper, it is not surprising that his company ran the only two-column ad to appear that first year. Also on this date, the first real estate advertisements appeared, featuring for sale "three or four houses and lots... also, several good claims which prospect well." Beginning about 1 July tidbits of news were gathered under the gothic script heading "Local News." However, many of these items were probably paid advertisements. For example, "New Brewery — by accident during the week we stumbled into the brewery of our friend J. J. Schlawig." On the same date, the paper announced that Progressive Hall, in addition to the usual assortments of wines, would have "ice cream constantly on hand" and "are prepared to serve iced drinks all the season."

Another landmark event of that summer was recorded on 22 July with the first advertisement for theatre: "First-Class Male and Female Comedy Company." On 29 July an ad for the Grand Central Hotel stated that another story would be added and the "Best Bed-room Furniture in Western Dakota,... Feathers, Hair and Pulu Matrasses [sic]." Businesses increased as indicated by ads for the Miners & Merchants Bank, the Gen'l Custer House, and Pioneer Brick Yard, beginning on 19 August. The only "Help Wanted" ad was for a "first-class butcher" at the Montana Meat Market. The ad ran for several weeks so apparently prospecting was a more attractive vocation than meat cutting.

An increasing number of ads appeared for out-of-town establishments catering to the Black Hills trade, indicating that the Pioneer had a wide circulation outside Deadwood. For example, in the 16 September issue, banking houses in Sidney, Nebraska, and New York advertised their interest in buying gold dust and bullion. The Monkeys, a Cheyenne firm, ran an intriguing ad selling "Cigars, Tobacco, and — well, you just go and see the MONKEY'S CAGED IN THE BACK ROOM; and you will smile." On 9 September the first mention of the Bella Union Varieties appeared. The ad promised "song, dance, pantomine, etc." It was the "etc." for which the Bella Union would become famous.

Although the city was lined with gambling houses, which kept their doors open day and night, only one advertisement men-

28. Ibid., 1 July 1876.
S. J. SCRIBER & CO.,
GREAT WESTERN
Outfitting House,
Dealers in
Horses, Harness, Wagons, Tents, Guns,
Hats, Shoes, and
MINERS' COMPLETE OUTFITS
16th St., Opp. McDaniel's Theatre
(Sign of the Big Gun),
CHEYENNE, WYOMING.

J. K. P. MILLER, JAMES McPHERSON.
MILLER & McPHERSON,
Wholesale and Retail
GROCERS,
All kinds of Provisions, Mining Tools and
Miners' Supplies kept constantly on hand.
Corner of Main and Wall Sts.,
DEADWOOD, S. D.

EXCHANGE BANK,
DEADWOOD, S. D.
JAMES McPHERSON, - - - Cashier.
Pay the highest price for Gold Dust, Coin and
Bullion, sell Exchange on New York, available
in all the cities of the United States and Canada.
Collections made and proceeds promptly remitted.

L. FULLER,
Surgeon Dentist,
Can be found at his Dental Parlor, on
Main Street, Deadwood City,
at all hours of day or night.

CHICAGO
Via
St. Paul or Yankton,
Or Via
Pierre or Bismarck.

A CENTRAL
HOTEL,
C. H. WAGNER, Proprietor.
(Formerly of the Walker House, and Saddle
Rock Restaurant, Salt Lake City).
tioned gambling: “Morton’s Club House, fitted, Remodeled and Reopened with the finest stock of Ales, Wines, Liquors & Cigars, ALL BANKING GAMES dealt by polite and attentive gentlemen, who will endeavor to entertain.”

By 16 December, Deadwood had a “Surgeon Dentist” who claimed that he could be found at his Dental Parlor at all hours of the day or night. A touch of class was added to the advertisements on 13 January 1877, with “Graves & Curtis, dealers in China, Glass and Queensware, Carpets, Furniture and Bedding, Coffins and Metallic Burial Cases.” And on 24 March a nursery advertised plants to be shipped to the Hills. Deadwood was taking on an air of permanence.

Although some of the most serious news in the Pioneer may seem amusing to today’s readers, the editors did include a great deal of deliberate humor in the form of short filler items. The first issue contained a bit of local humor reflecting the rivalry of the towns attempting to profit from the gold rush. “A Cheyenne freighter tells of a Sidney man who dreamed . . . that he died and went to heaven, but was surprised to find no other persons from his locality inside. They were all standing outside the portals of bliss arguing that the Sidney route was the best one by which to reach the Black Hills.” On 24 June the first poetry, a maudlin bit of doggerel verse entitled “Unlucky ’49ers Lament” appeared. On the same date, two filler items included: “Brigham Young is sufficiently recovered to sit up and get married occasionally” and “I thought ’twas queer he didn’t holler out the last time I hit him, said Mrs. Huse of Alabama to the juror who were trying her for the murder of her husband.” The second item was so typical of the Pioneer’s reporting style, it may have been a news item.

“A Nevada audience dislikes to be disappointed,” we learn on 24 June 1876. “Three thousand persons gathered to see a murderer hanged at Carson, and their enjoyment was spoiled by a reprieve from the Governor. That night a party of miners, who had walked ten miles to witness the execution, caught a horse thief and hanged him to a tree.” From the Savannah News: “Much has been said of the enormous consumption of tobacco, and yet you would be surprised to find how few men use it when your supply runs out and you ask for a chew.” As fall approached, petty thievery was becoming a problem. A lady reported some joints of stovepipe had been stolen and “she supposed the stove would

29. Ibid., 16 Dec. 1876.
30. Ibid., 30 Sept. 1876.
The girls were harassed again on 9 September when readers learned: "Neuralgia in the faces and heads of women is largely on the increase due to the inferior protection afforded by the mode in which women now cover their heads. It is not only one of the most common of femenine maladies... It is also a cause of... habits of intemperance among women.”

There was nothing in the first few months of the Pioneer that could even remotely be called social news. Life was hard as evidenced by this stark notice in the first issue, bordered in black: “DIED SASSE — In Deadwood City, June 8, 1876, CHARLEY, only son of Charles Sasse, aged three years. Inflammation of the bowels.” This was probably the first child to die in Deadwood. The death announcement becomes even more tragic when we learn that Charley’s little sister, Alvena, who was the first white child born in the Black Hills (in Custer, 11 May 1876), died in November of the same year.33

The first really gala social event in Deadwood was the first Fourth of July celebration. It was the Centennial and the miners wished to show their patriotism to the outside world, which branded them as outlaws, so the celebration was truly a once-in-a-century event. The weather was “auspicious” with refreshing breezes and balmy air. The day was ushered in with the firing of one hundred guns between midnight on 3 July and daylight, and at sunrise every gulch was wreathed in rifle smoke as the miners sounded off. At nearby Montana City “a strong detachment of sturdy, buck-skin clad mountaineers... poured volly after volly into the massive mountain walls opposite.... The scene was grotesque, it is true, but the boys were doing their ‘level best.’ ”34

31. Ibid., 23 Sept. 1876.
32. Ibid.
34. Black Hills Pioneer, 8 July 1876.
In Deadwood the flag was raised on a newly cut timber topped with a golden sphere—the “liberty pole.” Patriotic songs and more gunfire continued until noon when the speeches commenced. A petition asking that the status of the Black Hillers be legalized was enthusiastically signed by the miners. Although the celebration continued “in random manner... until day-light,” eastern friends should take note that “there was not a single personal altercation, not even an angry word uttered, that we heard of. How is that for ‘outlaws in a lawless country?’” Later in the month, on 15 July, it was announced that the Langrishe Theatrical Troupe had arrived. The Langrishe theatre was to be an important center for theatrical entertainment for several years and the Langrishes were to play an important part in the cultural and social life of the city. Apparently, theatre held more interest for the citizens of Deadwood than did education, for although a meeting to organize a school was reported on 29 July as a “commendable move”; apparently, there was no school until 20 November when a Mr. E. Kermode began classes. By 16 February there were twenty-seven pupils.35

There were a variety of amusements available in Deadwood. The “Temple of Music” advertised “Pretty waiter girls” and “Tom Miller's Bella Union seems to be drawing a liberal share of patronage this past week. Of course, the show is of a Vaudeville type and is a little naughty.”36 “On Thursday evening last,” it was reported on 16 December, “the General Custer House was re-opened.” A grand ball was given under the auspices of the Deadwood Social Club with the elite of the city present to dance the waltz, polka, schottishe, and quadrille through the public rooms of the remodeled hotel. A description of the most elegantly attired ladies followed, and it is interesting to note that there were fourteen married women and only four “misses.” This same issue contained several ads for a GRAND MASQUERADE BALL at the Bella Union on Christmas Eve. Apparently, this was where the “badlanders” or those not included in Deadwood's “social elite” did their celebrating.

That first Christmas in Deadwood must have been an exciting night, what with the masquerade ball at the Bella Union, a shooting affray at the Melodeon, and a Christmas night performance that included a trapeze act at the Langrishe theatre. Earlier, the theatre had been reported closed for the season, but

35. Ibid., 11 Nov. 1876; 17 Feb. 1877.
36. Ibid., 2 Dec. 1876; 16 Sept. 1876.
the Langrishes had remained for the winter, and since the article mentions, “The theatre will be comfortably warmed, six new stoves being placed therein,” perhaps the difficulties had been overcome.37 Late in December, a social column emerged with news of elegant dinner parties and grand balls. For five dollars a couple could attend a dinner and ball New Year’s Eve at the General Custer House. On 17 February the announcement of a Calico Ball to be held at the Custer House rated the heading “Telegraphic News.”

Deadwood’s first organized prize fight was reported on 13 January, having taken place at Al Swearenger’s Cricket Saloon between the “Belfast Chicken” and “Cook, the Kid.” The fight was described—all fifty-two rounds of it—at which point it “was postponed until the 28th of January, when it will be renewed for a purse of $250.”

As the first and only year of the publication of the Black Hills Pioneer as a weekly drew to a close, there were several signs that civilization was on its way to Deadwood. On 7 April it was announced that the Catholic Bishop of Omaha was sending a priest to attend to the spiritual wants of the Catholics. A notice from the Internal Revenue Service advised dealers of tobacco and liquor of “Special Taxes to begin May 1, 1877.” There was more discussion on the need to establish the Black Hills as a separate territory, and the rebuilt Bella Union began running a large ad to promote its status as the “largest place of amusement west of the Missouri.” Clearly, although it would retain its rowdy, bustling, and exciting aura into the twentieth century, Deadwood was growing up.

That spring Merrick completed arrangements for the Pioneer to become a daily. This was no doubt the result of competition from Deadwood’s first daily, the Daily Times. The last issue of the paper as a weekly was printed on Saturday, 2 June 1877, and on Sunday, 17 June 1877, Volume Number One of the Black Hills Pioneer as a daily appeared. The weekly paper had existed almost exactly one year, the year of 1876-1877—one of the most exciting and colorful in the history of the West.

37. Ibid., 16 Dec. 1876.