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Business Letters from the Apache Country

THE Society has just been presented with the business records of Bigelow, Kennard and Company, of Boston, one of the oldest jewelry firms in this country. The papers fill over sixty packing cases. A preliminary inspection of them has revealed about a dozen letters from an army officer, stationed in New Mexico in the early 1850's, shortly after it came into the possession of the United States, which give a most interesting glimpse at the isolated and sometimes adventurous life of an army post in the Apache country, and at the ways in which business reached the frontiers of the great West.

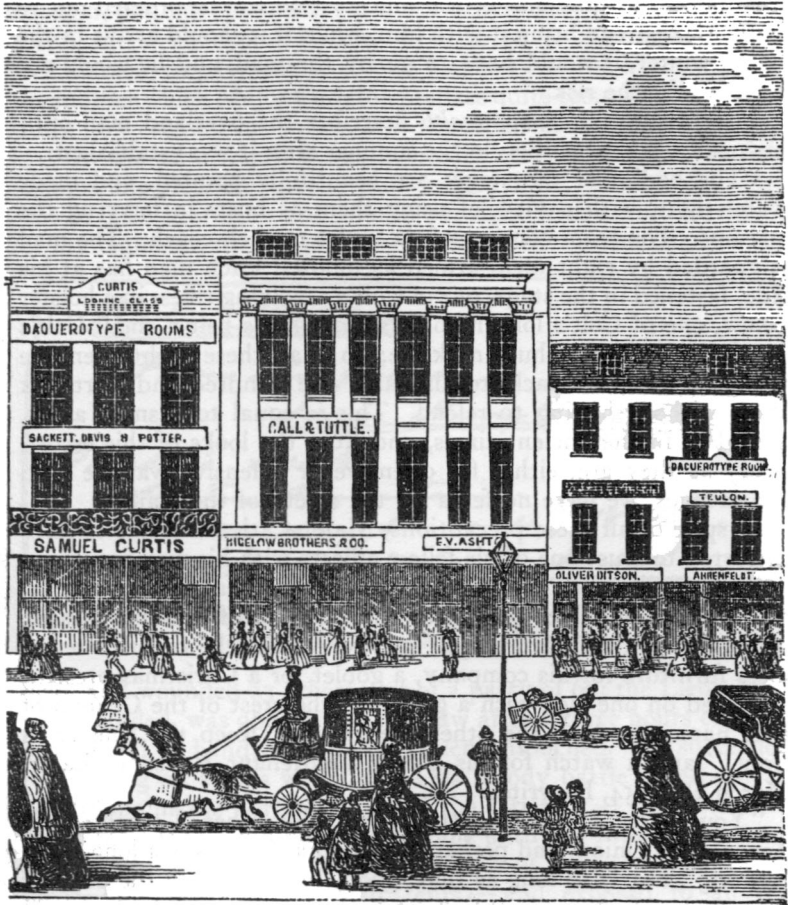
If you trace the westward course of the star of empire through historic times you will always find business enterprise preceding or following it. The great undeveloped region which the United States acquired by the annexation of Texas, the Mexican War and the Gadsden purchase proved no exception to the rule. Since the time when a disappointed Coronado and the sad remnant of his army of exploration and conquest marched back to the City of Mexico without having found any more of the fabled wealth of the Seven Cities of Cibola than a few blue-green, turquoise-like stones, the Spanish territory north of Mexico had remained almost empty of settlers. This territory included what are now the states of California, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming and Oklahoma. Those settlers that there were had not, by the middle of the nineteenth century, progressed beyond the herding of cattle or an inferior grade of sheep, and the primitive cultivation of a few crops.

In the decade after Moses Austin, a Connecticut Yankee, secured from the governor of the province of Texas a land grant on which to establish three hundred families, more immigrants settled in Texas, under similar concessions to other impresarios, than had come in three hundred years of Spanish administration. American trappers like Kit Carson, Old Bill Williams and "Old Gabe" Bridger were supplying the East with beaver hats from Rocky Mountain beaver taken in New Mexico and the neighboring states while they were still a Mexican province; and Yankee sea captains were smuggling nearly all the manufactured conveniences of life into California in exchange for hides.

After the annexation of Texas, and the cession of the rest of the territory, following the Mexican War, there remained the problem of introducing some order and seemliness into the newly acquired possessions. The native inhabitants of the region known as New Mexico were in a particularly miserable condition, poor, uneducated and completely terrorized by the Indians. In the Navajo country the Indians let the Mexicans live only as herders, for they found it easier to steal the Mexican cattle than to raise their own. Army posts were established, and the scattered garrisons took up the task of defending these helpless new Americans from the Indians.

The letters were written by James Henry Carleton, Brevet-Major, at that time, in the First Dragoons. He had taken part in the border disturbances between Maine and Canada known as the Aroostook War, and had become a Second Lieutenant in the First Regiment of Dragoons in 1839. After that, he went through the Mexican War, with the rank, first of Captain, and then of Brevet-Major, earned by gallant and meritorious conduct at Buena Vista.

The letters are written for the most part from Fort Union and Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he was stationed after the War, and from which he was sent periodically on exploring expeditions, or sallies after hostile Indians. The principal city of the district, Santa Fé, boasted twenty-five stores, one hotel, one printing office, numerous grog-shops, two tailor-shops, one apothecary, a bakery and two blacksmith's shops. Everything that could not be furnished by these establishments had to be brought from a great distance under difficulties. In Major Carleton's first letter, he gives directions for the last touches on a watch he has previously ordered from the Boston jewelers, then known as Bigelow Brothers



THE SECOND STORE OCCUPIED BY THE BIGELOW FIRM, THE BOSTON JEWELERS WHO SUPPLIED MAJOR CARLETON WITH EVERYTHING FROM SILVERWARE TO NEWSPAPERS AND A BEAVER HAT. JOHN BIGELOW STARTED IN BUSINESS IN A BUILDING NEAR THE OLD STATE HOUSE, IN 1830

and Kennard. He expresses the hope that it can reach Missouri in summer, so that one of the officers who will be ordered out to New Mexico can bring it with him, while if it should arrive in the fall or winter, it would have to go by the mail, and he would not care to take the risk.

The Missouri *Commonwealth* describes the overland mail optimistically, a year earlier, in the summer after it was established:

"The bodies of the stages are beautifully painted, and made water-tight, with a view of using them as boats in ferrying the streams. The team consists of six mules to each coach. The mail is guarded by eight men, armed as follows: Each man has at his side, fastened in the stage, one of Colt's revolving rifles; in a holster below, one of Colt's long revolvers, and in his belt a small Colt's revolver, besides a hunting-knife; so that these eight men are ready, in case of attack, to discharge one hundred and thirty-six shots without having to reload. This is equal to a small army, armed as in the ancient times, and from the looks of this escort, ready as they are, either for offensive or defensive warfare with the savages, we have no fears for the safety of the mails."

In spite of all these precautions, Major Carleton seems to have preferred to trust one of his fellow officers with his watch.

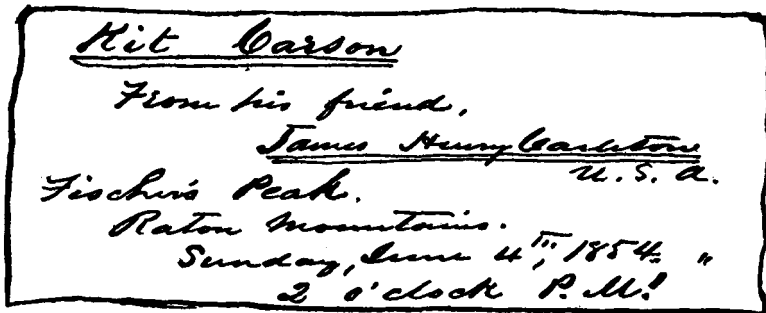
Besides silver for the table, described in great detail, and including a set of silver goblets to serve instead of drinking glasses, which he says are hard to get in New Mexico, he orders a set of mess furniture for his company, a goblet for a Christmas present, engraved on one side with a garland, (the crest of the General of that name), and on the other the motto, "Keep the Enemy in front!" and a watch for his friend, Lieutenant Ransom. Later, March 28, 1854, he writes:

"Your letter dated the 11th of last November, I received *via* Texas, Fort Union, and perhaps California, for it was a long while 'coming'; nearly as long as that 'good time' of which the popular song makes frequent mention, and which 'good time' our friend Ransom might fancy to mean his watch." Before the watch arrived Lieutenant Ransom was ordered East, and Major Carleton directs the firm to send it care of Colonel Robert E. Lee, U. S. A., Superintendent of the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, New York.

The Boston jewelers seem to have rendered all sorts of miscellaneous services to the isolated army officer, for twice he thanks them for sending him newspapers and colored prints, and in an-

other place he asks them if they will look up a good hatter in Boston, and have him make a black beaver hat, fitted with a rich band and a handsome buckle. It is to go to the famous scout, Kit Carson, in payment of a bet. The story of the hat is a sequel to another which Major Carleton prefixes quite casually to a request for a new case for his watch, and the repair of the old one.

"On the 2d of April I was hurriedly ordered to take the field against the Jicarilla Apache Indians," says he, "who had broken out in open hostilities and who in *one* fight with Lieut. Davidson of my regiment, on the 30th of March, killed 23 men dead on the



THE INSCRIPTION FOR THE INSIDE OF THE HAT THAT KIT CARSON WON ON A BET FROM MAJOR CARLETON

field, and wounded 23 others, out of a party of 60: the Lieut. himself wounded, was obliged to withdraw after a three hours conflict, often hand to hand, with only 14 men untouched. He succeeded in bringing off all his wounded. This bloody battle called out all the troops in the northern part of the territory — my own command included. I did not return home until the 16th inst. having been in the field and actively in pursuit of those Indians for 76 days — my command without tents — and exposed to all the rigours of the weather amongst the snows and forests and deep rivers and almost impenetrable woods of the most formidable of the whole Rocky Mountain range. . . . But I did not sit down to trouble about an Indian war but to write you a word or two about business. . . .

By the by: As I did not want our friends the Apaches to get my fine watch in case I "went under," (they do not understand the use of watches, although when you are after them, they understand perfectly the value of time), I left it with my wife. The case . . .

opened hard, and by hook or crook with her delicate thumb-nail, she managed one day in forcing the back open to wind the watch, to break the hinge, and so I cant use it until *your* people put it in order, for I wont let these bunglers out here look at it."

Kit Carson, it seems, was guiding Major Carleton's expedition against the Apaches.

"I told him," says the Major, "that if he would find the Indians for me on that day I would give him a beaver hat. He told me in the morning soon after we had started from camp, that he knew by the 'sign' we should come up with them. Said he, 'I will shew them to you at 2 o'clock this afternoon.'

At 5 min. to 2. P. M. we discovered the camp on the summit of Fischer's Peak — whipped the Indians — and Kit won his hat."

Major Carleton's subsequent career in the Civil War was a distinguished one. In 1862, he commanded the "California Column," and he was later raised to the rank of Brigadier-General. He was ordered to relieve General Canby in the command of the Department of New Mexico, which he retained for several years, taking part in several engagements. Afterward, he was brevetted Major-General for conduct during the War. Since the last of his letters to Bigelow Brothers and Kennard, we have only the bare facts of his military record. The box of old papers of that firm has not been completely unpacked, and it is to be hoped that it will prove to contain some of the later impressions of their sprightly correspondent of the 'fifties.

Records of a Universal Science

ALTHOUGH Dr. Einstein has shaken our faith in the very existence of an absolute standard of measure or weight, the expression of length, area, volume and weight by comparison with standards which to our senses appear to be stable will continue to be a necessity of human society, even of the very existence of mankind. As John Quincy Adams stated it:

"Weights and measures may be ranked among the necessaries of life to every individual. . . . They enter the economical arrangements and daily concerns of every family. They are necessary to every occupation of human industry; to the distribution and security of every species of property; every transaction of trade and commerce; to the labors of the husbandman; to the ingenuity of the artificer; to the studies of the philosopher; to the researches of