

The Compass: Earth Science Journal of Sigma Gamma Epsilon

Volume 84 | Issue 2

Article 4

4-17-2012

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Larry E. Davis

College of St. Benedict / St. John's University, ldavis@csbsju.edu

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Recommended Citation

Davis, Larry E. (2012) "Herbert Hoover: Only an Eye for Gold?," *The Compass: Earth Science Journal of Sigma Gamma Epsilon*: Vol. 84: Iss. 2, Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/compass/vol84/iss2/4>

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HERBERT HOOVER: ONLY AN EYE FOR GOLD?

Larry E. Davis

Department of Biology
College of St. Benedict /
St. John's University
Collegetown, MN 56321 USA
ldavis@csbsju.edu

KEY WORDS: Herbert Hoover, Kalgoorlie-Boulder gold mining district, Western Australia folklore

ABSTRACT

Herbert Hoover, 31st President of the United States, was a successful mining engineer and author prior to becoming president. Part of his mining engineering career was spent in the goldfields of Western Australia, where he has become part of the local folklore. Hoover allegedly had an eye for the ladies and fell in love with a barmaid to whom he wrote a love poem.

INTRODUCTION

In this issue of *The Compass*, Merriam (2012) presents a brief history of Geology and the American Presidency. The article concludes with a discussion of Herbert Hoover, the only U.S. President with a science degree and that degree was in geology! Before becoming President of the United States, Herbert Hoover did make a significant contribution to mining geology, but there is an interesting side note to Hoover's time in Western Australia, which has become part of the 'folklore' of the Western Australia gold mining district.

KALGOORLIE-BOULDER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Although most of Hoover's Western Australian mining experience took place in Leonora, he did spend time in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder gold mining region located 235 km south of Leonora. Today, Kalgoorlie-Boulder is the home of Western Australia's superpit (fig. 1), an open-pit mine that is so large it can be seen from space. Other than the fact that the streets are paved with bitumum (asphalt) and it is a bit easier to get a glass of water (water is brought to Kalgoorlie via a 530 km pipeline from the Mundaring Weir near Perth), Kalgoorlie seems to have changed very little from when Hoover spent time there. Prostitution is legal, as it was in Hoover's day and it's still the same rough and tumble mining town. Over 100 years later, the legacy of Hoover's time in Kalgoorlie still persists and he is still part of the local lore. Unlike the rigid and dour personality attributed to the Depression Era Herbert Hoover (McElvaine, 1984), it seems that Hoover had lighter side and allegedly had an eye for the ladies.



Figure 1. View of the Kalgoorlie super pit from approximately 1000 metres. Photo by Larry Davis (2010).

During his visits to Kalgoorlie, Hoover was a regular guest at the Palace Hotel (fig. 2) where he allegedly fell in love with a hotel barmaid. Later, as a gift to the hotel, where he spent much of his time wooing the barmaid, Hoover arranged for an elaborately carved mirror to be delivered to the Palace Hotel. The mirror now stands in the foyer of the hotel (fig. 3).



Figure 2. Palace Hotel, established in 1897, where Herbert Hoover stayed during his trips to the goldmining areas of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Photo by Larry Davis (2010).



Figure 3. Hoover's Mirror, a gift to the Palace Hotel in Kalgoorlie. Story of Hoover's Mirror and portions of his love poem are framed to the left. Photo by Larry Davis (2010).

Next to the mirror is a framed poem, which Hoover purportedly composed for the hotel barmaid:

*“Do you ever dream, my sweetheart,
of a twilight long ago,
Of a park in old Kalgoorlie, where the
bouganvilleas grow,
Where the moonbeams on the
pathways trace a shimmering brocade,
And the overhanging pepper form a
lovers’ Promenade.*

*Where in soft cascades of cadence
from a garden orchestral band.
Years have flown since then, my
sweetheart, fleet as orchard blooms in
May;
But the hour that fills my dreaming,
was it only yesterday?*

*Stood we two a space in silence, while
the summer sun slipped down,
And the grey dove dusk with drooping
pinions wrapped the mining town.
Then you raised your tender glances
darkly, dreamily to mine,
And my pulses clashed like symbols in
a rhapsody divine.*

*And the pent-up fires of longing
loosed their prisons weak control,
And in wild hot words came rushing
madly from my burning soul.
Wild hot words that spoke of passion,
hitherto but half expressed,
And I clasped you close, my
sweetheart, kissed you, strained you to
my breast,
While the starlight-spangled heavens
rolled around us where we stood,
And a tide of bliss kept surging
through the current of our blood.
And I spent my soul in kisses, crushed
upon your scarlet mouth,*

*Oh! My red-lipped, sun browned
sweetheart, dark-eyed daughter of the
south.*

*It was well that fate should part us, it
was well my path should lead,
Back to slopes of high endeavour, aye,
and was it well, indeed.
You have wed some southern squatter,
learned long since his every whim,
Soothed his sorrows, borne his
troubles, sung your sweetest songs for
him.*

*I have fought my fight and triumphed,
on the map I've writ my name,
But I prize one hour of loving, more
than fifty years of fame.
It was but a summer madness that
possessed us, men will hold,
And the yellow moon bewitched me
with its wizardry of gold.*

*Let them say it, dear, but oft-times in
the dusk I close my eyes
And dream drift back to where the
stars rain splendour from the skies,
To park in far Kalgoorlie, where the
golden wattles grow,
Where you kissed me in the twilight
of a summer long ago.
And I clasp you close, my sweetheart,
while each throbbing pulse is thrilled,
By a low and mournful music that
shall never more be stilled."*

SUMMARY

So, it would seem, Hoover was not only a brilliant mining engineer, he was also a hopeless romantic and poet. Although Nash (1983) and Coughlin (2000) discount the authenticity of both the mirror and the love poem, no visit to Kalgoorlie is complete without a visit to the Palace Hotel and a look at Hoover's mirror.

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