

ADVERTISING AND THE KLONDIKE.*

With the advance of civilization come additional factors in the shaping of the courses of historical events. Along with the broadening of business activities has come the growth of a new science, advertising. We have had much written on the various economic phases of history, but, prior to the recent war propaganda, little or no attention has been paid to the possible effect of skillful advertising on history.

The American business man is continually in search of new fields of productivity. Although the breadth of his vision has never been exactly measured, it is known that he has played no small part in showing the Nation where to plant the flagstaff. His efforts have never been confined to small areas or to those close at hand. Sometimes the Orient, often the Caribbean, and occasionally even the Northwest have beckoned insistently. The period of the Klondike craze in the last three years of the nineteenth century is one of these occasions. It illustrates an influential factor in the removal of the "last frontier" by "westward expansion". This factor is advertisement.

During the autumn and early winter of 1897 the Klondike rush promised growth and profit to the Pacific Coast cities. Their thinking business men and boomers reasoned in this wise:—

1. Outfitting of would-be Klondikers must mean money in the pockets of whoever sold the outfits.
2. Any given city would have all the trade which no other city seized.
3. Any means of diverting the flow of travel and trade from opposing cities was good business and permissible ethics from the point of view of the competing metropolis.
4. Incidentally a certain amount of service might be claimed as rendered to the public.

This reasoning brought on an inter-city rivalry which can be understood by a discussion of Seattle's part in it.

On July 19, 1897, a certain Thomas J. Church wrote from Chicago to General J. B. Metcalf of Seattle, describing the interest of midwesterners in Klondike possibilities, and the efforts of the

* The basis for this study is a scrapbook collection of fourteen volumes entitled "Alaska and the Klondike" which was given the Library of Congress by Mr. Erastus Brainerd, who was Secretary of the Bureau of Information of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce during the period referred to. The collection includes manuscripts, telegrams, printed cards and circulars and the formal report of the Bureau to the Chamber dated March 1, 1898.

Southern Pacific to direct the route of travel toward San Francisco. Similarly, the Canadian Pacific was advertising Vancouver and Victoria; the Oregon Washington Railway and Navigation Company, Portland; The Great Northern, Seattle; and the Northern Pacific both Portland and Seattle. General Metcalfe showed this letter to Mr. Cooper, a prominent business man, with the result that a meeting of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce was called for August 30, following, to consider "measures for widely advertising the city of Seattle as the principal outfitting point for Alaskan miners and also to counteract the efforts of other cities in the same direction." At this meeting the Chamber voted in favor of the appointment of special committees on advertising and finance, to make these measures effective.

Within four days the advertising committee had organized with Mr. E. F. Sweeney as chairman and Mr. Erastus Brainerd, be it noted, as Secretary. These gentlemen were able to prepare a Tentative Project of Work which was rewarded with the cordial approval of the committee. It carried the signatures and united opinion of all the committee members and declared their implicit faith, as business men and members of the Chamber of Commerce, in "elastic publicity". It advised a campaign of paid and unpaid advertising, strongly reinforced by propaganda, for the best results.

Mr. Brainerd at once presented this Project to the Board of Trustees and received their hearty approval and cooperation. He could have the use of the Chamber of Commerce rooms: the Republican State Committee would loan a desk and the cash would come from the business men, taxed according to the probable amount of benefit received by them. The special committee thus became permanent. The excellence of the choice of Mr. Brainerd as paid Secretary, student of psychology, and opportunist, was demonstrated by his energetic prosecution of the twelve points in the Project. Not the means he used, but the adjustment and correlation of them, made his work significant in the history of the Klondike and of advertising. The means employed, classify themselves in four groups:— 1 Newspapers and Periodicals; 2 Civic Pride; 3 Circulars; 4 Interlocking Correspondence.

For the purposes of direct advertising, Seattle followed the lead of her competitors in choice of publication and type of advertisement. Because Portland and Victoria had been advertising in the *New York Journal*, Seattle paid \$800 for three fourths of a page

in a Sunday issue. Similarly, the *American Review of Reviews* had been carrying Canadian matter: *Munsey*, *McClure*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper*, *Century* and *Scribner's* enjoyed patronage with a like motive. The great ardor of each Chamber in correcting the misconceptions created by the others was exploited by the advertising mediums, whose business managers took much pains to follow up each tilt with suggestions that the aggrieved city set the world right by more advertising. Mr. Brainerd felt these controversies were justifiable if cheap, and used clipping bureaus to inform him of inaccuracies about Seattle, as well as other cities. Taking clipping as an index, Seattle advertised five times as much as her competitors. Also the Secretary wrote feature articles, particularly a well-illustrated one for *Harper's* and one of two columns for the "Jubilee Edition" of the *Tacoma Ledger*. (It is not known why the Tacoma editor offered this courtesy.)

The Associated Press played no favorites. It used material from all sides as plate matter for editorials. At first, Mr. Brainerd felt it a real achievement when Seattle material went into plate editorials. But when his clippings showed him that his competitors were similarly blessed, he learned that most editors could blame the Association for errors on Klondike affairs. Thereafter, he tried to have his corrections placed in that part of a paper devoted to local matter. Thereby, his corrections were more widely read than the original error. Editorials were of course far less valuable than news items, of which an excellent example is the following:— a paragraph widely published under the date line of Seattle, Sept. 3:

"As a result of the Klondike excitement, which has overwhelmed the city with inquiries from all parts of the world as to routes of transportation and cost of outfitting, there has been established, under the auspices of the Chamber of Commerce, a public Bureau of Information."

This confusion of cause and effect passed unnoticed by the general public.

Seattle's periodicals were used for purposes of distribution, to create a cumulative effect when the same correspondent had received a series of periodicals. Newspapers have a natural tendency to exploit themselves by special editions, so the "Klondike Edition" of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* served as capital in a gigantic scheme of distribution. It went to:—every postmaster in the United States upwards of 70,000: every public library, 6,000: every mayor of a

city, nearly 4,000: Great Northern Railway, 10,000: Northern Pacific, 5,000.

When the Secretary undertook to insert small advertisements in county seat newspapers only, he learned that the Western Newspaper Union and other publishing houses customarily mix county seat papers with village issues on the syndicate circulation lists. But he had studied the replies to circulars issued early in the game for hints as to the profitable advertising localities, and was able, by selecting three lists distributed over states in the middle west and southwest, to attain the large circulation of 9,990,400 papers. The most numerous responses to these advertisements came from regions in which an over-supply of labor caused industrial disaffection.

Mr. Brainerd understood the delight of rural townsmen in published letters from former friends who have "moved away". The only thing necessary was to persuade the movers to send the letters. After experiment, he sent a confidential plea to employers and heads of organizations, explaining why it was not "desirable" to take this step publicly, drawing attention to the special value of personal letters in a neighborly community and asking them to urge their clients, congregations, subordinates, employees and friends, to at once correspond with their old home paper and friends in the East. For this, the Bureau offered to furnish the material all ready for the affixing of names and signatures, to pay the postage, and to post the letters. The "drive" was a psychological success.

The wastebaskets of our public officials mutely testify to the present commercial and political popularity of the circular idea. In 1897, the Seattle Bureau of Information carefully promulgated four circulars, varying with the intended recipient and his intended reaction:— 1 To newspapers and publication: 2 To governors and mayors: 3 To important officials everywhere: 4 To Senators and Representatives.

Circular 1 informed every daily in the United States and every publication having over 5,000 circulation, that Seattle was *the* port of departures and outfitting station for the Alaskan gold-fields. It was generally printed by all classes of periodicals—without charge.

Circular 2 asked a number of questions, in order that the conservative business men of Seattle might avoid the pitfalls of stampedes and might inform inquirers as to the facts on the gold fields. Its attraction was enhanced by the Chamber stationery, typewriter type, and the word "dictated" prominently placed in an upper cor-

ner. It expressed solicitude for the good of the public. Finally, it inquired for prospective migrants and their place of outfitting. By most of the governors and mayors the circular was referred to their local dailies and printed. The personal response varied inversely with the size and importance of the locality and gave opportunity for a display of humor on the part of the officials of large places.

Mr. Brainerd analysed the replies to these circulars, consulted influential Seattleites, and achieved his masterpiece, Circular 4. This he was able to put forth as an official proclamation, because he persuaded the Secretary of State (of the State of Washington) to sign it. It was a combination of the paternal, advisory, and reassuring: it can have deferred few who had already made up their minds, and must have reassured the timid. For example, although shooting rapids was inadvisable, "Of those who have gone in. . . not more than half a dozen have lost their lives and these from carelessness in fording." (Conditions are still such that it is difficult to prove assertions about Alaska.) All were reminded of the willingness of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce to impart information. Because this message entered the channels of the press via public officials, it was considered seriously at home and abroad. The ministers of France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland and the Baltic countries sent it as a communication to their governments, by whom it was gratefully printed. This foreign idea was pushed so far as to include Christmas gifts, sent to the crowned heads of Europe, of Alaskan and Klondike photographs and views. The Prince of Wales and President McKinley had a greater liking for their gifts, than did the German Emperor, who refused a package that "might contain dynamite."

The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Dominion cities, proclaimed the advantage of outfitting in Canada, as soon as their Government placed 30% tariff charges at Klondike ports of entry. United States railway officials sent Mr. Brainerd strong protests, and shortly thereafter, he sent Circular 4 to the "representative Americans" comprising the Senate and House of Representatives. As good protectionists, they were petitioned to nourish the "new field of American enterprise" in Alaska and at Seattle. The apparent cooperation of the British Government and the British Columbia Board of Trade, and the alleged activities of Lieutenant Governor McIntosh in diverting Americans from Alaska to the Northwest Territory made a strong case, on the strength of which

the encouragement of Americans to outfit in American cities and to prospect on the American Yukon was urged. Quotation was made from a correspondent of *Harper's Weekly*, (Mr. Brainerd) as to the superiority of Seattle for Alaskan trade. Finally, the members of Congress were asked if they would favor an immediate settlement of boundary and tariff issues, the establishment of an army post on the Yukon, and the division of Alaska into two territories.

In spite of their preoccupation, a large number of replies to Circular 4 were received. These were in conformity with our legislative system and indicated an attitude of uninformed wariness. The legislators either refused to commit themselves for lack of knowledge, or reserved the right to change on more complete information. The more active promised to investigate the subject—which indicates the importance of a Chamber of Commerce. Party men remembered senatorial courtesy, as when J. D. Hicks and O. W. Underwood promised to be governed by the opinions of Senator Wilson and Congressman Lewis of Washington. Opposition to the present division of Alaska showed itself, although a better government and a delegate were advocated, in conformity with the national tradition of a colonial policy looking toward self government where possible.

Throughout this advertising campaign, the Seattle business men were bound together by an ingenious system of interlocking correspondence, which quietly gave merchants the names of possible customers and which made them prompt with the dues owing to the Bureau of Information. The nomadic character of western population, personal pique, editorial antipathies, and local pride, wove a network of espionage which was used to inform Seattle of her rival's plans that she might forestall them. All the Coast cities were contending with the railroad officials for the exclusive use of certain special privileges, such as cut rates, passenger running, and distribution of train circulars. Also they were trying to secure definite promises from Secretary of War Alger, for the outfitting of advertising. ?

Finally, what were the results? As to legislation, the March Report of the Bureau asserts that "No little of the energy and information of Congress shown in its dealing with Alaskan affairs at this session is due to the literature that they have received from this committee." The actual record of the 55th Congress shows an increase of at least 300% in the number of Alaskan bills passed, with

a corresponding number which died in committee. Other factors in these increases are not hard to find. The question of the effect of the advertising upon the city of Seattle is equally debatable. Although the census shows an increase of population from 42,837 in 1890 to 80,671 in 1900, this increase was mostly in the laboring population, at the time when Alaska and Seattle both stood in greatest need of capital. It cannot be gainsaid that the Bureau of Information of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce gave momentum to the growth of both the Klondike and Seattle.

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