

## A Rich Life - Isaac Alden

With excerpts from an interview of Isaac Alden by Carolyn Rhone, part of a scrapbook of items compiled by Elsie Ruske, and an interview of Mrs. Nina Gemmill by Patience Kemp Born on a farm in southeast Indiana in 1843, the youngest of eight children, Isaac "Ike" Alden moved to Missouri as a young adult and soon grew tired of farming. He decided "why not go West!" In 1876, when he was age 33, he "took up huntin' for money" in the original Dakota Territory. He explained to Carolyn Rhone in 1927 that "three hunters and a hauler usually went out on a kill. The hunters would fill one wagon, and while the hauler went into Deadwood and sold the deer and banked the money in the Tom Thumb Bank, the hunters would get another load ready." He said he heard the guns firing at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, and many times risked his life to work in hostile Sioux territory.

He said that in about the late 1870s, "I read in the Cheyenne Leader how rich the gold fields were in North Park, and how you could pick gold right off the ground. I said to myself, 'When I went to Deadwood, I didn't know anything about ore, or granite or quartz. Now, I know something. I'll go to North Park and strike it rich!'" He stayed first in Teller City, Colorado, but then moved on to Lulu City, in what is now Rocky Mountain National Park. Ike reported, "Lulu had some log cabins, just kinda throwed together with mud, the fireplaces in the corner, built of sticks and mud, would last for awhile, but later on they'd fall to pieces and like as not the fire would set the cabin on fire... There was seven or eight in our gang that come from Dakota. We had grub enough to last us a long



time but they was so many folks that had come into the country with one coat on their back and a loaf of bread under their arm that they ate up our grub. We had to feed seven extra our very first night. You can't refuse grub to a man who's hungry."

Ike and his gang started for Georgetown to resupply, but "along came Antelope Jack with some tourists (*possible mine investors*) and when we told him we were going to Georgetown for grub, he said, 'Go to Grand Lake'." Ike continued, "We found most of the town camping the other side of the outlet. Dealt with Judge Coulter who sold us 100 lbs. of flour for \$3.00, and bacon and coffee, and sugar, cheap, too. He could have charged us anything. We decided not to go back to Lulu..." Ike started prospecting for silver around the then town of Stillwater, "but a poor man has no business with the kind of ore I found. Takes a big company to handle it. I never made but \$5.00 out of it", and that by selling a sample to another desperate miner. Ike later prospected "on Gravel Mountain, up Willow Creek and Gold Run."

Then in 1883, Ike found not silver but gold on Gravel Mountain. He said, "It was an accident, really. I was all alone. I had come down with mountain fever, bad, and I was startin' to town. I set down to rest... against a huge rock, when I looked down as I set there. I thought, 'That's nice quartz rock, that is.'" He soon found that he had a "volcanic throat, and if I ever see rich ore, that was rich." He wanted to bring a sample down into Grand Lake, but he said it was stolen from him by someone in Gaskill. He was sick, and so continued on to Grand Lake.

Ike never did relocate his veins of gold, but kept trying. He said in 1927, "Fires and new trails have always thrown me off but I think I have my bearings now. I went last fall, and found out where the old trail was. I'll take out \$100,000 afore I sell it. And I won't have no partner in the lode. It ought to run \$80,000 to a ton."

Ike stayed in Grand Lake doing odd jobs to earn a living, building up enough to support his mining efforts, and befriended many in town. He was remembered by Mrs. Nina Gemmill, in an interview with Patience Kemp. "He would go across the lake to a spring to get drinking water for the hotel, and would make me sit flat in the bottom of the boat to be sure I didn't dangle my hand over the side and go over, you know. He was a great playmate for me, and a protector. There were some boys came into the cabin across the street who threw rocks at me, and hit me above the eye. I carried the scar for many years there. And Alden said, 'You show me where those boys are.' They never bothered me again. So he fought my battles for me when I was not able to take care of myself." Ike died in 1933.



Ike Alden on the Boardwalk