

PRICES IN THE EARLY FIFTIES.

--From notes by H. C. Bailey.

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In trying to recall facts half a century past, and the various conditions in regulating prices and the divergence from present conditions, the subject becomes rather confusing.

Storage and transportation were large factors in regulating prices. In many cases it cost twenty-five cents a pound freight and even more for water transportation. I can only vouch for the water lines, though I have no doubt of the correctness of prices given second-hand.

If surplus goods were thrown on the market they, in many cases, became almost worthless. It was the case in San Francisco once with tobacco. Boxes of tobacco were used for foundations for houses and for steps across the muddy streets. It could not be sold nor storage procured. This sounds fishy now, but I have the best assurance of its truth.

Brussels carpets at 50 cents per yard or even a little less sounds a little queer. But I have the serene assurance that such was the case. A considerable list could be made along this same line. The cause was injudicious shipment.

It is hard to believe the odd and useless articles that were landed at 'Frisco from '50 to '55-6, brogan shoes and many other worthless things in clothing. In one cargo sold with the ship, were a great many tuscaloosa bonnets.

At the time of which I write, shoes were as little worn as boots are now. To get storage for goods was impossible. Hence many things when landed at Frisco had absolutely no value and had to be thrown away. Along the line of clothing and provisions, prices were more stable, as they were forwarded

as received with a comparatively regular movement.

Prices of such commodities reached extremes only in cases of scarcity, and that, with one exception, was confined to outlying places. In a few cases flour went as high as \$50 a sack of 50 pounds, when the same could be had for \$2150 in Sacramento.

The supplies all had to be packed on mules to many districts and an early snow storm or late spring (or opening, as it was called there) cut the supply short. Footgear was not excessively high, probably 25 to 40 percent more than now.

By wholesale, liquors, except wine and beer, were cheaper than now, although a drink was never less than 25c, or a pinch, which meant a pinch of gold dust from the other fellow's purse.

I have heard a good many tell of an old fellow in Nevada whose thumb seemed to be about an inch wide. He had reduced pinching to a science.

The best hotels charged 50 cents for a drink or a cigar. Most of the saloons were kept to open on the street like the present fruit stands, only the public was kept out by a bar counter. On the counter was kept custard and fruit pies, cuts of tobacco, hard boiled eggs and cigars. All but the custard were two-bits; that was four-bits a quarter. I have seen three, four and five go to a bar for a treat and take three different kinds.

In 'Frisco, Sacramento and Marysville, drunkanness was rare. There was no hanging around bars. Everybody was in a hurry. Time was the only thing that anyone tried to economize. "Time is worth more than money," was the universal cry and practice.

But the amount of drinking was enormous. To give some idea of the

profits, I will give the rental of a bar in Crescent City, a second class hotel, with probably 75 or 100 patrons. The bar space occupied about 8 x 10, and paid \$600 a month. Seldom five minutes passed that from two to six were not being waited on, and in two minutes all were gone.

The most extravagant prices were charged for fruits and vegetables. It took the mining population a long time to realize the agricultural possibilities of California. John Chinaman was here by the thousand, but had not taken to gardening.

A truthful man told me he had paid \$5 for an onion. Irish potatoes were worth 16c a pound. Honolulu yams (that no one would eat now), 16c. Other vegetables about on the same line. I never paid more than 75c for an apple, but have known them to sell for \$1.25. The first peach I tasted (not a large one) cost 50c.

Why did we pay such prices? Not for the fruit, but for our old homes' sake. We lived largely in memories of the east in those days. We were willing to be here in person for a few years, but our hearts and thoughts still hovered around our old homes.

Chickens were \$4 each and eggs \$2 per dozen. I have sold butter at our door for \$1.25 per pound. Honey, for two or three years after it came on the market, sold for \$1.25 per pound. But for space I could continue this longer. But enough has been said to give a partial idea of prevailing conditions of the times.