

An Old Style Sleeping Corral

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from notes by H. G. Bailey

I doubt if one percent of those who may read this will have any idea what a sleeping corral means. But all who traveled around in the early fifties were familiar with the institution--most of them by actual experience; said experience often leaving a real lively aftermath that kept the subject constantly reminded that something lively was going on inside his clothing.

If not so lively as the frisky flea far more persistent in his slow but constant locomotion, seeking better feeding places. When one tried to look for him, he had a most tantalizing way of burrowing into a gray flannel shirt, and being partial to that color, was hard to find.

The first corral I ever slept in was the upper floor of a two story hotel about 50 x 30, with an aisle about six feet wide in the middle running the full length of the room the long way. Three foot aisles were running off at right angles with two rows of cross legged cots between the aisles and about three feet of space between the cots. The cots were about thirty inches or maybe a little more in width, and had a small pillow filled with most any old stuff--straw or carpenters shavings leading all other kinds--with colored cloth covers of some kind for a case. The bedding consisted of a calico sheet and a pair of gray blankets. All could be had for one dollar a night--no extra charge for company.

As I sit writing and trying to recall through memory's dim haze the California of half a century ago, my credulity is taxed to believe what memory asserts is time.

It hardly seems possible, fifty short years could develop such a change in dress, habits and general characteristics.

There was probably no one peculiarity more distinctive than dress. As the old home outfits wore out and were cast away, the great bulk of the population seemed to gravitate to an almost universal style of dress, peculiar to California.

Coats were well nigh discarded, except by professionals, and in many cases, even by them. The coat was superseded by the woolen shirt as an outer garment. Many of these had worked fronts of various patterns and material and were well supplied with pockets.

The material graded all the way from broad cloth to common flannel.

The rancher, miner, teamster, mechanic, mountain merchant and trader and hotel keeper, with few exceptions, adapted the shirt. Suspenders were almost universally discarded. I bought one pair during my fourteen years residence and possibly used them six times.

Where conditions demanded, an overcoat was used.

Most all traveling was done on Shank's express, and most all passengers carried their blankets. A large percentage of stage and steamboat passengers carried blankets for two good reasons--on the boats there were generally from two to four times as many passengers as bunks, and all wanted to avoid the corral as much as possible in the country.

If one had his own blankets he could strip off the bunk bedding, use his own with fewer chances of carrying off the other fellow's livestock. None were held in lower esteem for carrying blankets; rather the other way.

The soft hat was universal outside the cities and nearly so there.

Another feature of the times was every one seemed to be going somewhere or after something and much afraid some one would get ahead of him. Even the professional gambler was most always on the move.

A gathering of a few hundred, as was frequently the case at that time, at elections, horse races, etc; in the costumes of the times, would be an interesting sight today, worth going a long way to see.

The dude and slough were on hand, same as now, varying only in the material of their dress--there being only one style. Everybody was dressed for ease and comfort and where the taste demanded, artistic style was adopted.

A ten or twenty dollar shirt, artistically braided in flashy colors, thrown wide open in front, with flashy, large cravat in fancy double bow, made a rather artistic appearance.

About 54 or 55 the shirt era began to wane. Too many women were coming; churches began to organize in out of the way places, and women didn't take to the shirt phase and it had to go--who ever heard of anything succeeding (except the saloon or possibly

Reed Smoot) when the females set their face and efforts against it?